Paula Palmer

Hello and welcome to the Stonewater's On *The Air* podcast. This is the second episode in our end of season, Double Bill on Investment. Following our last episode on investing in homes, today we're focusing on supported housing and asking what it really means to invest in people, not just places. Supported housing plays a critical role in society, providing safety, stability, and support to those who need it most, from young people building independent futures to survivors of domestic abuse and older people living with dignity. Let's give a big welcome to our guests.

We've got Jeremy Porteus from Housing LIN, and my Stonewater colleagues, Vicky Chase, who's Housing Manager at Exeter Foyer, and Sarah Pugh, who is Domestic Abuse Services lead. It's great to have you all here. Thanks so much for joining us. Jeremy, welcome to our podcast. Can you please start by introducing yourself, telling us a little bit about you and Housing LIN, and then what makes a well-designed retirement living scheme truly effective in both care and cost?

Jeremy Porteus

Hi, everybody. My name is Jeremy Porteus. I'm the Founder and Director of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network, or LIN, for short. The Housing LIN was originally developed and set up in the Department of Health to support transformation of health and social services, to really better understand what the housing solutions could be to enable people to either reduce demand on our health services or to avoid access to residential care. We're now a national knowledge exchange platform sharing good practise ideas and solutions.

One of our key areas is understanding the housing design qualities that make an ageing population live longer and better and well in their own homes for as long as possible and move to supported living or extra care housing at the appropriate time. Those design qualities are something that we call care readiness, built onto the lifetime homes design principles, which are about greater accessibility of our homes for everybody, as well as looking at some specific issues to enable people who require more purpose-built accommodation as they age, to look at the types of adaptations, equipment, and technology that can be used to support people who live independently in their own homes.

Paula Palmer

Lovely. Thank you very much. Taking us from older people to younger people, Vicky, can you tell us about Exeter Foyer and the young people you support there, the emergency accommodation? What's your biggest challenge in supporting all that diverse range of people?

Vicky Chase

Hi, I'm Vicky. I am a Senior Services Manager at Exeter Foyer. We house 34 16–25-year-olds. Within that, we've got a number of different contracts. We're commissioned by local authority to provide support to a number of different cohorts within that age group. We have emergency beds for people that are in crisis, in a homeless crisis. We have a complex care leavers bed, which, as the name suggests, they have higher complex needs, higher risks. We have a number of beds for higher-need young people. We also have four beds for young families. It tends to be we are walking a tightrope between need and risk all of the time, particularly with the introduction of young families.

For example, at the moment, we have three newborn babies. All the young people came to us at late stages of pregnancy, and they have all given birth in the last 2 or 3 weeks, so we've got three very tiny ones. I'm sure you can imagine that some young people that we have referred to as can be quite chaotic. They can have quite a high level of trauma. It's balancing their needs versus their risk. We have to be really careful about who we have in the building and when they are here, where they go within the building, so we've got quite a rigorous flat matching process.

We also have to look at our staff team have to be really consistent. We obviously have rules within the building, but again, it's another tightrope of we're walking between being really flexible, because we have to meet people as they are on their journey. We have to be flexible on a person-centred basis, but we also have to be really consistent. Again, it's a really fine balancing at where we're having to go down the middle of, "Okay, we need to be flexible to meet your needs, but we also need to be fair to the 34 other people that are in the building." It's tough, but I wouldn't change it.

Paula Palmer

Very rewarding, isn't it? It sounds. I didn't appreciate the depth of all the different support roles you have. We talked about younger people. I didn't realise you'd have babies there as well.

Vicky Chase

Yeah, that's new. We've been doing it for 2 years now, so that's a new one. It was a new one for us.

Paula Palmer

You're a multitalented bunch. Sarah, let's find out a bit more about your service. Can you help us to understand the broader cost of domestic abuse, not just financially, but socially and emotionally, and how supported housing plays a role in breaking the cycle in your area?

Sarah Pugh

Yeah, absolutely. It's estimated that every year 2.3 million adults will experience domestic abuse, 1.6 million of those are women, and 712,000 are estimated to be men, and that's a lot. I think one of the stereotypes about domestic abuse is that it doesn't happen on our street, it doesn't happen in my workplace. It happens, one in four women, one in six men will experience domestic abuse at some point in their lives. The most recent cost estimates of domestic abuse puts it around £66 billion per a year worldwide, and that is a huge cost. Actually, that's not worldwide, that is just in the UK, sorry. Sixty-six billion pound a year.

That's the physical and emotional harm that comes from domestic abuse. That's people having time off work because of injuries or fear or just not being able to go to work because that's part of the rules in the power dynamic. It's also the cost of public services, the police call out, the hospital visits. It's huge. That's why having supported housing, having refuges and safe spaces for adult and child survivors is so important. We have to as well remember that the emotional toll on fleeing domestic abuse is enormous.

When we think about people sofa surfing, that instability, that danger, that risk that they're trying to flee from and get safe to, and that's what happens when safe housing and safe accommodation isn't available. It's so important and it's so critical because without it, often survivors have nowhere to go, and they will end up back in those really harmful, toxic situations. Then we have to think about the children that are associated with those families and the impact that it's having on those.

In our refuges and in our spaces, they get that safety, and they're not having to constantly live in fear. Yes, it's unknown. Yes, it's uncertain at first, as it is in any new spaces. But they're able to start really starting to safeguard themselves and settle down, processing what they've witnessed, understanding it wasn't their fault, learn what abuse looks like. I think for children as well, it also helps children realise what love is and what love isn't, and hopefully start to break that intergenerational trauma that we often see through families and through generations.

Yes, supportive housing, it is that foundation for people being able to heal, and often for the first time having a safe space to begin building that foundation and accessing therapy, rebuilding their confidence, accessing legal and benefit systems, and just starting to build their life. I remember working with a survivor in refugee. She was in her 30s, and she didn't know how much a loaf of bread costs because she never had control of finances. She was never allowed to go to the shop, and even that realisation that I'm in my 30s and I don't know how much a loaf of bread costs, I had no idea it was X amount of money.

I think it's really important. When we're investing in supported housing, we're not just investing in individual lives. We are investing in communities and society as a whole,

and every pound spent really helps that strain on public services. The cost-benefit analysis is brilliant, and we should be investing in supported housing more.

Paula Palmer

Goodness, me. Those figures there were staggering. I can't believe that, and, yeah, really heartbreaking stories. We're building up a picture of how important supported housing is, so let's talk about the impact. Jeremy, how can we build retirement housing that actively supports wellbeing, combats loneliness, and reduces demand on health services.

Jeremy Porteus

Listening to Sarah and Vicky there just shows how critical housing is, and supported housing is in particular, to our health economy. Research that we've done with the Local Government Association and looking specifically at supported housing for older adults in Southampton shows that if we get it right, we can effectively reduce demand on our primary and our acute services to such an extent that we can save nearly three-quarter of a million pounds per scheme by people not using the GP services, outpatient services, A&E, ambulance services. Some of the health metrics being developed now shows that housing actually can be much more preventative than we've previously understood. The week that we're recording this is also the week that the NHS is going to publish its 10-year plan.

Thinking at a macro level and building on the Foyer and the examples we've heard, we really need to think how we can invest in, not just in our capital in terms of our building, but also in the people to enable those better outcomes, because the evidence shows that not only does it help us improve system efficiency in the services, but also delivers better outcomes to that person-centredness that Vicky highlighted.

Our experience is that we can save up to £1.4 billion per annum simply by reducing the likelihood of falls in our homes, and that's not just older adults, that's children. In fact, if you look at the stats, older adults and children are the highest in the categories who fall.

What we need to do is to really demonstrate, build that evidence, and show that both the ability to enable people to live healthier and well for longer in their own homes or in a home of their choice, like supported housing, as well as saying to our health professionals, how can we build more effective partnerships so that we're not just scrambling around every year for funding, but we can actually have some long-term commitment, requires us really to have, I think, a new dialogue and a new type of partnership, which is built on the person, but actually says it helps deliver greater system efficiencies to enable local systems to plan better, but also for people to be much more confident that actually they can live healthier, and what we call

professionally compressed dependency, to enable people to be less dependent on statutory services if we can give them a better quality of life in their own homes.

Paula Palmer

Gosh, there's so much information there. Again, some staggering numbers that you popped out there, like the money that could be saved just by providing better supported homes in the lead up to, or to prevent the need for care, isn't it?

Jeremy Porteus

Yes. If I could just quickly come in on that. The real challenge in a local economy, in a health and social care economy, is that that money that's effectively saved isn't cash releasing. It doesn't go to housing. We also need to develop those partnerships to say, "If health and social care can invest in housing and vice versa, how can we mutually create a much more effective system that meets the population's needs?" Whether it's people experiencing domestic violence or younger adults and the children in Vicky's Foyer, right through to somebody living with dementia, for example.

Paula Palmer

Lovely. Vicky, you described your services as a bit more relational and community-focused rather than transactional. How does that approach impact outcomes for your young people?

Vicky Chase

We work predominantly on strengths-based systems. Here at the Foyer, we've moved away from traditional views of supported housing. Particularly for this cohort and this age group, it wasn't working as well as it should have been. They don't particularly like just sitting down across from you and talking about stuff and filling in support plans. They don't like that. They're a really active group of people. We had to look at that and change the way that we work. What I did was, and this was recommended to me by an offset inspector, was to walk the building in the eyes of a 16-year-old and imagine coming in as a 16-year-old.

We changed everything from the way that we introduce ourselves as team members, because it's all about increasing those outcomes. Every child, young person that comes in here is going to come in here with a level of trauma from somewhere. They are also going to be coming in with an attitude that most of the adults in their life have either failed them or not come through for them and not done the things that they said they were going to do. That's a really important approach for us. We wanted to take away that, them and us attitude, which is quite traditional.

I've worked in supported housing for 22 years. There's always been an element of it's them against us thing, and we wanted to take that away completely. We wanted people

to come in. We are holding your hand, and we're walking alongside you from the moment that you come in because this is your journey. We're empowering you to find the answers within yourself because they all know the answers. We've also had to work backwards and think the greatest person that can tell us what they need is themselves. We are empowering them to tell us what they need from us.

We say we're a bit like Google, you tell us what you want, and we will facilitate it for you. We've looked at a number of different ways of engaging with people. We do activity works, we make memories with them. For instance, last year we had a visit from therapy llamas. My boss walked in and there were two llamas in reception, and I said, "Oh, about that..." But it was just a really great way to get people that might not have engaged before, engaging with staff. It's about building that rapport.

The team I've got here are great. They build really strong rapports with young people, which is really important because we need our young people to come and tell us, be really honest with us about when things have gone right, when things have gone wrong, what's happened over the weekend, so that we can work with them. We need a really honest, truthful picture.

What we found is it has increased their outcomes. It's increased their confidence. It has bettered their outcomes. We're getting more people leaving us and going into independence with greater opportunities, having achieved amazing things here. That could be, they've achieved keeping their room tidy on a consistent level for a long period of time, or it could be someone that is going off to university. It's a real mixed bag, but we're really confident that the way we're working now has really increased those outcomes.

Paula Palmer

I've got one question for you, Vicky. How do you remember what it's like to be a 16-year-old?

Vicky Chase

I think working with young people every day keeps you young. I don't have the mentality of a 45-year-old any more.

Paula Palmer

Lovely. Sarah, Stonewater offers more than traditional refuge spaces. How do dispersed properties and tailored support better meet the need of your survivors or our survivors?

Sarah Pugh

Traditional refuge spaces are really important, and we absolutely need more of them nationally. But what we have acknowledged, as have many providers been down the country, is that the traditional refuge space isn't suitable for everybody. No two survivors

are the same, no two young people are the same, no two older people are the same. The support that we're offering can't be, either we have to be led by the needs of the community in which we're delivering these services.

Our model goes beyond that traditional idea of a refuge, and we offer dispersed accommodation for people who wouldn't normally be able to access refuge at all, that traditional type of refuge. It removes the communal aspect of refuge living. It removes the staff on site, Monday to Friday, eight till six. Instead, it's almost like satellite properties where a survivor will get their own front door keys, and whether it's a flat or a house, and they have that property that they're living in, they have their own bathroom upstairs, downstairs. In a lot of cases, they're furnished to a really high standard. There's the washing machine, the tumble dryer, microwaves, kettles. A survivor can walk in with their family and not have to worry about, "Oh, I need to get some plates, I need some knives and forks." It's all there, ready to go. They just need to bring clothes and any personal belongings.

The dispersed accommodation works for male survivors, for example, because we know up and down the country, there are very few spaces for male survivors of domestic abuse and even fewer for male survivors who are fleeing with children. It works for people with pets because we know that a lot of people won't leave abusive relationships if they can't take their pets, and I certainly wouldn't leave my property without being able to take my animals with me. They can take pets into their dispersed accommodation. We have someone in dispersed at the moment who's got several dogs. They wouldn't be able to do that in refuge.

Families who have older children as well. We're in a cost of living crisis as well as a housing crisis. What we're seeing more and more is people staying living at home with their parents because they can't afford to move out into the private rent sector or get that mortgage or there are no social tenancies available. They can continue to live with their mum or dad or family members in dispersed. If they were going to refuge, we wouldn't be able to do that.

Survivors who, for example, have access needs where standard refuge just doesn't meet or if they need carers coming on a daily basis to support them with their care and support needs, we can't have that in refuge because of risk and things like that, confidentiality. It's just about moving with the time and understanding that not everybody is going to experience domestic abuse in the same way.

Dispersed properties, they offer more privacy because staff aren't on site, they're more independents, and that's important as well for people who are recovering from trauma, and they don't want to go into refuge and feel like they're taking a backward step in terms of having to close gates or consider noise levels or these things that they haven't

had to consider when they've lived in their own properties or their own tenures, whatever that might look like.

We also have dedicated spaces for LGBTQ+ communities. We've got a dedicated refuge, dispersed accommodation, sorry, for the LGBTQ+ survivors in Swindon, because we know that a lot of survivors will experience domestic abuse from the LGBTQ+ community. They're more likely to experience domestic abuse and hate crimes as well. Having that dispersed accommodation where they can be who they are with pride, as well as recovering from domestic abuse, is really important and having all that support in place.

We also have an Asian women's refuge in Bedford. Because again, we know that support not only has to reflect someone's needs, but it also has to reflect their identity and their lived experience. If it doesn't, then it's not truly effective, and it's going to take a lot longer for them to recover.

Much like what Vicky was talking about, we offer trauma-informed and person-centred support. It has to be shaped around what that individual wants, what they need, and what they're ready for because they've lived that life of being controlled and having decisions made for them. We are there to walk alongside them and empower them to live healthier, happier lives long beyond when they're with us. It's really important to have different models because everyone's different.

Paula Palmer

Crikey. There's a lot to consider. Jeremy, I'm coming back to you. Can you tell me a bit more about CollaborAGE, which I think is of intergenerational communities? How do you see these models shaping the future of supported housing?

Jeremy Porteus

Absolutely. I talked earlier about the need more collaborative ways of working types of partnerships. I think there are two issues that come out for us. From CollaborAGE, we see this across the life course. In other words, it's not just about older people. Age is a life course issue. Younger adults, right through to later life adults, as well.

We want to help people capture those lived experience, the person-centredness that we've been talking about, but also to make sure that it's not just a one-off transaction. This has to be collaboratively polled, used, grab those lived experiences, and work towards something which we call co-production or co-design. That really helps inform, shapes, and delivers the types of services that are so desperately needed for many vulnerable people in our communities. That's where we think that CollaborAGE approach can help both inter-generationally, across the generations, as well as helping people, specifically in particular age cohorts, to live independently.

It's something that Lord Best and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People is currently looking at. There is an inquiry that we'll report in early 2026, which will pull out some of the key recommendations around that collaborative approach to enable generations to work across generations.

That could be, for example, a school visiting a sheltered housing scheme. It could be older adults who are participating in local social activities. There's a number of different relationships here, and those relationships are critical. These aren't, I think, one-off relationships. These are things that I think housing associations as anchor institutions in their localities can play a really important role to both capture that, but also to help develop those communities.

We heard some of the issues already around the LGBTQ+ and some of the disadvantages that other groups also experience. We can overcome those disadvantages through more collaborative approaches.

Paula Palmer

I think we felt a little bit of the impact of that during COVID, didn't we? There was lots of helping up and down the generations. Grandparents perhaps helping to teach the kids or people dropping in on neighbours, making sure they had everything they need for their weekly shopping.

Jeremy Porteus

No, absolutely. That buddying approach enabled us both in terms of how to use social media or technology, except for Facebook group or WhatsApp group, right through to making people who weren't lonely lonely, and addressing some of the real big mental health issues that impact because of loneliness. Again, these intergenerational activities help address both the emotional but also psychological well-being of people in a really big way.

Paula Palmer

Great. Right, Vicky, what would happen if supported housing like yours didn't exist? What are the risks for our young people?

Vicky Chase

Well, it's my turn to bust out some stats. Every year, 100,000 young people age out of the care system. Of those, 26% have reported as being sofa surfing, and 14% have slept rough. The horrifying statistics are for care leavers, in particular, they are 25% more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, but they are about 179% more likely to be exploited, latest studies have shown. The reason for that is, I think, A, imagine being 18 years old and not having a home. Not only do you not have a home, you don't

have the family system to fall back on. For most people, when they move out, it's a choice.

As Sarah said, there's lots of young people still remaining at home because of the housing crisis. These young people don't have a choice. They have corporate parents, they reach 18, and all of a sudden, they fall off an edge because they are now expected to be adults, and they are expected to be in the world, and there they are, ripe for exploitation. Sadly, there are a number of people within our societies and communities that need to exploit other people in order to keep, for want of a better word, their businesses going. Without having eyes on, without having a safe and stable place to go home to, without having safe and stable adults around you, you're at risk of exploitation. Not just that, you're at risk of deterioration in your mental health.

An average person, if I was to be made homeless today, my mental health would deteriorate quite significantly. For a young person without a safety net, I'm lucky I have safety nets, it's going to deteriorate even further. You get into the position where it's a revolving door because they are unable to access the services because they don't present as perfect packages. Young people, in particular, you have to really read between the lines because a lot of the time, they won't present as someone that's being exploited, but they are. You read in that they are poorly represented in the media by... They're marauding the streets and stabbing each other. A high percentage of those young people in the media will be being exploited, a huge percentage of them.

Because nobody's looking for them, nobody's finding out when they're supposed to be home, whereas we do. We've got eyes on them every day. We're positive role models in their lives, but also we're positively saying, "These are things that you can do." We're making sure that they don't miss opportunities. If we weren't here, there would be A, a huge cost, a societal cost, but also there would be strains on all sorts of services, such as prisons, mental health. But for those individual young people, those 100,000 people that are ageing out every year, they would miss so many opportunities. These kids are our future. They're our society's future. They're our country's future. We want to make sure that they don't miss those opportunities to have a great life.

Paula Palmer

That's a really depressing alternative, isn't it? Thank goodness for services like that. Great. Sarah, what are the current barriers people are facing in accessing safer accommodation, and how can we overcome them through smarter investments?

Sarah Pugh

One of the biggest barriers, I would say, is capacity. There are simply not enough refuge spaces nationally. The demand for safe accommodation massively outweighs the supply and what we've got, and especially for those survivors who are facing additional

risk and additional vulnerabilities because of their complex needs, the larger families, accessible accommodation. Those are the survivors who are more likely to be repeat victims of domestic abuse. They're going to be in those relationships longer, and they're going to face greater risk and greater harm because of those additional vulnerabilities.

Every time a space is unavailable, every time we have a survivor who took that courage to reach out for support, and is being told, "No, we've not got space or the space we have isn't suitable," we're leaving a family in danger and a survivor who is stuck in crisis and potentially a survivor who's not going to have the courage to pick up the phone again and seek that support for a while, so it's a real, real problem. At Stonewater, we have 63 refuge spaces nationally, and at the moment we have 12 dispersed properties. Obviously, we're not the only provider of these spaces up and down the country, but we're often turning referrals away because we just don't have the spaces available.

Another issue around that is the lack of move on accommodation. We have regularly got families who are in our accommodation. They're ready to take that next step. They've done that hard work. They've built their confidence, and they are ready to go and live independently, but they have nowhere to go. They're on waiting lists. They're registered with the local authority, and they just have nowhere to go. They don't have the financial means to go and get the mortgage. They don't want the instability that the private renting sector can often bring, so they are waiting for local authority to give them support.

One of the benefits of a housing provider providing these services is that a survivor who is living in a Stonewater supported accommodation can access our internal management move, and that really helps us utilise our stock to the best of our ability. They don't jump any queues or anything, but it just puts them on another register and that they can benefit from that, that other survivors who aren't living in our supported accommodation couldn't access. We've seen a lot of success stories through that route. That bottleneck is a serious issue and something that we're constantly trying to combat.

We have still too many nationally, not just Stonewater, but too many of our buildings don't meet the needs of disabled survivors, and I'm not just talking about malleability issues, I'm talking about those who've got neurodiversity as well. There's no wet rooms. They don't necessarily have visual fire alarms. Not enough staff who are trained in British sign language. It is a very reactive rather than proactive approach that provides us take up and down the country for disabled survivors. It's something that we're doing internally.

We are doing a piece of work at the moment to try and improve that, at least in our buildings, where we're not going to say no to a referral because of someone's additional needs. We're going to be ready and prepared to do that, or at least responding very quickly to be able to make those adjustments. It's not where we should be in 2025, but it

is, but we are working on making it better. I think the smarter investment means changing all that, moving away from short-term funding by the local authorities. They provide short-term funding because that's what comes from the central government. We need longer term increased funding for these spaces, and those funding needs to be flexible. It needs to be inclusive. We need to keep thinking about all survivors, not just our cis, white, able-bodied women.

We need to be thinking about survivors who can't speak English, who don't have written access to public funds, who are disabled, who are male, who are non-binary, who are trans. We need to be thinking about all these, every corner and every aspect of the community to get it right for everybody, and recognising that that safe housing, it's not just about having a roof over your head, like Vicky has spoken about, like Jeremy has spoken about, it's that foundation for recovery and independence and long-term stability. That comes with having the right support in place when people are with us and are being accommodated by us.

Yes, the roof over the head is really important, but I would argue the support that people get whilst they're with us is far more important because that's going to make them fully functioning members of society and able to go and thrive and just be the best versions of themselves, and their kids can go on and do that as well. When we get that right, it benefits everyone, not just survivors and the services, but also the wider community, and, yeah, it's really important.

Paula Palmer

We said many times on this podcast that a stable home is a stepping stone to better social mobility and getting more from your life and stuff. Yeah, you're right. Greater support, better homes, and they can go on and do more things. Vicky, congratulations is in order. You recently got Ofsted accreditation, which brings more regulation and scrutiny, but also when we were chatting about this, you said more opportunity. Tell me some more about that. What's the opportunity?

Vicky Chase

Thank you. We were really proud that we got through our first stage of Ofsted accreditation. For us, we have always been regulated because, as I said earlier, we get commissioned by our local authority to provide support. We have quarterly meetings with commissioners. A lot of those are in person where they come and view the project. We have quality assurance all the time. Regulation wasn't a new thing for us, but obviously, Ofsted is an extra layer. I'm sure lots of people have heard about Ofsted, about the scary government body. There's a whole new layer of things that we had to put in place.

But what was really great was actually it gave us the opportunity to take a step back. When you have to produce something like a statement of purpose, you have to really sit and look, "Well, is that what we're providing? A, is what we said we're providing, what we're providing? And B, is that what we want to provide?" It's a real opportunity, and we're still going through the process of being able to reshape our services. It's a real opportunity for training and development for the teams here, and it's the biggest and best outcome from it. It's a real opportunity to get our young people involved. It's really about capturing their voice and helping them understand that they have an opportunity here to reshape services and to help us.

Quite rightly, the Ofsted inspector picked up that within our rooms, we have furnished rooms, and within our rooms, we're providing desk spaces, ideally for studying and things like that. What we didn't provide was a place for them to sit that was outside of their bed or a desk space. There wasn't a comfortable, cosy space, I suppose, if you like. We took that opportunity. We took that on board with the inspector. They were absolutely right. We took the opportunity to get a little working group of young people together and said, "What do you want? What do you use your room for? How often are you sitting? Are you gaming? What are you doing? Are you watching Netflix? Are you just chatting with your mates?" They came up with a plan.

Also, it was to do with sleep hygiene because obviously, if you're sat in your bed all day, it's really difficult. You will nap. Do you know what? It's just natural. To encourage them to sleep in at night as well. We were able to go to Stonewater's Community Investment Funding and ask for money to provide comfy chairs for all of the rooms. We got a variety of comfy chairs, put it to the vote, and the one that came out the most popular was the one that we bought. One was an absolute winner. We were able to provide that quite quickly. That was a quick win. But it was really nice for young people to really get involved. That's the biggest opportunity that's come out of Ofsted.

Like I say, we've still got a really long way to go. It's in its infancy at the moment, and I think we've got lots of things around the corner. But yeah, it's really changing the way that we're able to work. Like I say, it's changing things for the team. Hopefully, we'll be able to get a bit more resource and a bit more investment. Because whilst we're investing in young people, we need to invest in our teams as well. They're here day in, day out, rain, shine. To be able to invest in those teams and give them something back for all the hard work they do is another really important thing from Ofsted.

Paula Palmer

Okay, so, Vicky, congratulations again. It sounds like it's been a journey, but great to see you listening to the customer and with some fantastic results and better improvements to come. Jeremy, what do policymakers and investors often overlook when it comes to funding or planning housing for older adults?

Jeremy Porteus

That's a great question. Just building perhaps on what Vicky and Sarah has said is that we spend a lot of our time engaging with policymakers. It's always about the new money for new build. But actually, what we've heard is actually our existing services need to be supported and funded and reinvested in that as well. I think it's something that with the National Housing Federation, we are part of a coalition about saving our supported housing. I think that's something which is not really well understood by the politicians or the policymakers when we look at what new investment can go in.

Now, that doesn't mean that we don't need new investment. In fact, research that's been done by the Bayes University in London and the business school there shows that we need at least 30,000–50,000 new homes for supported housing per annum between now and 2040. Now, whether we're going to build those million new homes is another issue. But policymakers are very much driven on those numbers, the 1.5 million new homes in 5 years that the current government has been talking about. But much of that is around mainstream housing. What we need to really think is about how we shift the dial to think about all types of housing, including supported living.

Something that the last government did was to commission a task force to look at some of this. I had the privilege of being on that task force, and that's where that 30,000–50,000 units came out. But you'll be surprised to know that when we examined how much is actually built, it's between 5,000 and 7,000. You can see we've actually got a deficit year-on-year, which means the types of choices and the pressure on the services that Vicky and Sarah operate is going to increase because there isn't that type of provision, and we do indeed need to invest not just in the capital, but the social architecture, the staff as well.

There are some real big challenges in terms of the capital funding, yes. The news that the government is going to put £39 billion into affordable homes over the next 10 years is really welcome. But we also want to make sure that at least 10% of that is allocated to supported housing. Then we also need to think about how we revenue support those, how we fund those services, the types of contracts, the commissions we have, the type of arrangements we've got, how people can afford to live in those types of homes, the types of rents that they have to pay, the types of service charges.

These are all things that are the technical things behind the scenes that make the actual living environment suitable. If we don't have those high-quality services and meet those costs, we're going to find that we've got more likelihood that people will be sofa surfing for longer, threatened with homelessness, or not being able to move to the home of their choice as quickly as they'd like.

A bit of a policy issue here, but I do think in terms of the investment and the planning that you touched on there, Paula, if we can encourage greater partnerships to think

strategically around the type of housing demand that we need in our localities. That means working both with our local authorities, working with our voluntary sector, working with our health and social services. To understand what those needs are, we can be better armed to meet the needs in a longer term, but we need that commitment at a local level to develop that.

Just before I conclude, one of the things that the task force recommended was that every locality should have a memorandum of understanding between housing, health, and social care, so they could develop those data sets to help make investment decisions and plan for future supported living in their localities.

Paula Palmer

Again, so much to think about, isn't there? But there is this big commitment to building so many new houses, but is there the same commitment to making sure that the supported need is there I don't think there is.

Jeremy Porteus

We need to be more vocal about that. I think drawing on the experiences of people who are in the Foyers, et cetera, so that we can show what would be the alternative.

Paula Palmer

As your numbers and stats keep coming out, there's a massive benefit to it all. Let's not forget. Sarah, how does your team work with survivors to rebuild confidence, independence, and long-term housing security?

Sarah Pugh

I would say that everything we do in our support plans from day 1 is centred around what the survivor wants and when they want it, because often what we find with survivors when they're coming to refuge is that they need time to settle and decompress and just take stock of what that looks like for them. They're not going to come in after an hour and be like, "This is what I want to do." They need to have their options explained to them and explored, and things change, people change their minds.

It is understanding what their goals are, what their strengths are, and what they want their future to look like. Like I said, that could change from day to day, hour to hour, especially in those early days. We look at things like safety planning. We look at advocacy because there's a lot of systems to navigate as a survivor of domestic abuse, especially when there are children involved. Often our staff are their advocates and their eyes and ears in professionals meetings and supporting them around that. Supporting with parenting, with navigating the benefits' system, immigration is a minefield.

Our staff have to be a jack of all trades, and very much like Vicky said, "Tell us what you want, and we'll try and make it happen." They are the Google of the refugees.

We want, and we do work alongside each person and make sure that they have the ability to regain the control over their own lives and not just having that day-to-day survival, which they're often experiencing in those abusive situations. They're managing their safety and their risk on a minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour situation. Long-term thinking, long-term planning is not even a thing for a lot of survivors. It could mean looking at links to education, and that could be school or college for children or young people, or it could be getting adult survivors back into education of some description or training or employment, whatever that looks like.

We can support with housing applications, preparing people for move on, because running a household takes a lot. I think for people who have grown up in stable homes, people who then go on to run their own homes probably don't think about how much it takes to run a home. But if you've not had that foundation, if you've not got that skill set, there's a lot to learn.

I've got to pay my gas, I've got to pay my electric, I've got to do this. It doesn't all just magically happen. That doesn't stop when people leave refuge. We're not just going to leave people when they're ready to move on. We do offer support for up to 6 months after people leave refuge. We can continue that support and help them navigate independent living.

Whilst people are with us, we are also looking at that therapeutic support as well alongside that practical and emotional support. Looking at peer support groups, empowerment programmes that help them rebuild their confidence because it's so important, helping them connect with people who've had similar experiences and give them that hope that, "Okay, I might feel really lost right now. I might be thinking about going back because better the devil, you know. But if I just stick with this, if I just engage with that support, my life is just going to be exponentially better." Often, that peer-to-peer support, that can only come from people who've walked that path or walked similar journeys.

In the summer holidays, we have barbecues, we have pride events. We do a lot of inclusivity work as well. We don't just celebrate Christmas, we celebrate Eid, we celebrate different cultural holidays and do awareness raising around those holidays as well. We celebrate International Women's Day, International Men's Day. There's loads going on. We do local visits to Sea Life Centre, farms, and we get them out and about as much as we can money financially and what we can fund. Because it's not just about what's going on in refuge. There's a whole world out there, and we want to get them linked in with it and building those communities and those networks outside of that refuge as well, because it's not a forever home. It's a for now home, and it's a stepping stone onto their forever life.

Paula Palmer

I don't think I fully understood the scope and the breadth of what you do to support these people back into, I don't know, what's the term you'd use? I don't want to say normal life. That's not right, is it?

Sarah Pugh

I guess it's what a lot of people would consider normal life. It's what our normality is, I guess.

Paula Palmer

Vicky, your service seems to fill a vital gap between statutory care and adult independence. What further investment or policy support would help bridge that cliff edge that you spoke about earlier at age 18?

Vicky Chase

I suppose, quite like what Sarah was saying earlier, we need commitment from government and local authority to stop the short-term funding. All of our contracts tend to be based on funding for 2–3 years with possibility of extension. All the funding only lasts for 5 years. When you're 2 years in, you're then having to think about doing all your bidding for your contracts again, and it just doesn't work.

There needs to be that commitment to invest in young people and invest in supported housing across the board. There's so many supported housing projects that are disappearing because they just don't have the funding to keep going without that vital government funding. We would love to provide the level of transitional support that Sarah said that they provide. Unfortunately, we can only provide 12 weeks because we just don't have capacity to do any more than that. Funding for that transitional from when they're going from supported housing into independent living to make it successful and to stop that revolving door. If we spend a few pounds on that transitional support, we're going to stop the cost of them coming back around again. I think we also need commitment from holistic services that are around us.

They're stretched to breaking point as well. Like social services and leaving care teams are absolutely stretched. They've got such high caseloads, but we're also talking about mental health teams, substance abuse teams. That since the pandemic, since COVID, we have seen a lot of those holistic services shut down and never come back again. The ones that have come back, like even the statutory services, their waiting lists are so long because they just don't have the resources.

I think the government and local authority, central government policymakers, they need to look across the board, the whole picture, all of the services that these young people, that these survivors, that these older people, we need to be looking at every service that they access, not in isolation. We need to be looking at everything together and put in a package of funding across the board. That's going to be long-term funding across the

board because they're accessing different things all day, every day. When one of those things disappears, the whole thing goes to pot. It needs to be a commitment across the board.

The other thing that we need is it's fantastic that there's been a commitment to fund more social housing. We need to make sure that that social housing includes move on properties that are suitable for young people, that it's not just family housing they're building, that they are building studio flats, they are building one-bedroom flats, because, like Sarah says, we have a real bottleneck here. Unfortunately, we can't access management moves or anything, we very rarely can access any social housing. Their only choice is to go into shared private rented, which isn't appropriate for everybody.

Again, there needs to be that commitment that within that social housing, there's going to be appropriate housing for these young people to start their lives and build their foundations away from supported housing, because the last thing we want is for young people to get institutionalised and just end up in supported housing for their whole lives, because there is nowhere else for them to go. There needs to be a route out of here. The traditional ways of doing that aren't working, so I think the government needs to look at everything together rather than in isolation. That would be great.

Paula Palmer

Thanks, Vicky. Today is just such an education for me. I didn't see the bigger picture of everything and how it all fits together. It's fascinating and sometimes slightly disappointing that we can't do more or get more money from our money tree. Jeremy, can you talk to me about HAPPI? I think that's H-A-P-P-I, the design principles and how they influence mainstream and specialist housing to become more age and care friendly.

Jeremy Porteus

We've heard about the revolving door. I want to present a virtuous circle. If we can design our homes much better, we can actually enable people to live in those homes for longer and also make them more affordable. The Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation, or HAPPI, came up with a set of design principles. They have three particular... They're clustered around three particular areas. One is to enable people to orientate much more effectively in their home, both in terms of the immediate accommodation, which we have particular space standards that we recommend, so they're generous. But the idea being is that you can reduce the amount of communal area if you have much more generous living area.

The second is to make those properties energy-efficient and responsible for things like net-zero and becoming much more carbon decarbonization as well, so to meet our

climate change challenge, as well as thinking about how we can become more care-ready. As we change, will we need more care and support? The types of flexibility to do that may require some people to make some adaptations, put different equipment, to live in separate bedrooms, for example, or to use increasingly different styles of technology.

That technology is really important because by January '27, there's something called the digital switchover, and many of our telephones, our community alarm services, our systems that rely on analogue and existing telephone infrastructure will no longer work. We need to think about how we future-proof ourselves, not just for our building, but also for our ageing as well, and hence why HAPPI is important.

The other side of that is that it's not just about thinking about just any ordinary housing. While it can apply to mainstream housing, we also need to think about what does happen if we have to think about neurodiversity or dementia. We have a growing number of people who would like to live in mainstream housing who have a learning disability or autism.

Again, if we can think about how we can accommodate this, we think that HAPPI is a good foundation for more universal and perhaps inclusive design standards, something that a number of us are pressing the government to think about as they review part M4(2) and M4(3) of the building regulations. Now, for many, that'll be quite technical, but in effect, what that is, is can we make sure that all our homes are built to much more universal design standards like HAPPI, and wheelchair accessible in the long run.

Paula Palmer

I was going to ask how that principle was being put into practise, whether it's through government policy or direct to our housing builders.

Jeremy Porteus

There are two answers to that. There's a national framework through building regulations, but also at a local level, many of our regional mayors and local authorities also are developing their own building design codes, where anybody who wants to operate and develop housing in those localities will need to meet their design codes. Somewhere like London, for example, the mayor of London has said, "We want to adopt those universal design principles." Again, there are ways to develop that, both through the building regulations, but also in different types of incentives. I think, personally, Homes England and other funders also could build it into their capital spending brief. If you're going to develop new homes for everybody, please make sure that you look at how they could be HAPPI-reflective.

Paula Palmer

I like the idea of them being happy homes. Sarah, congratulations are also due to your team. You got the Leading Lights accreditation recently for your work in domestic abuse services. What does that involve, and how does it reflect the wider impact?

Sarah Pugh

Yes, it's a thank-you. We're really proud that we were able to get that accreditation, which is awarded by SafeLives. They're the national charity that are working to end domestic abuse and make sure that every survivor up and down the country is getting the right support at the right time. Our process for Leading Light started quite a few years ago now, and it started with us getting our staff trained on SafeLives training to make sure that regardless of what level they're working at, whether it's our frontline staff who are doing that work day to day, or it's the managers overseeing those refuges, or it's myself and my peers, Laura and Wendy, that we've all got that proper specialist training because it has to start there.

Leading Light is the gold standard. It is considered the gold standard for domestic abuse services in the UK. It's a huge deal for us as a housing provider because it really shows the credibility and the quality of the support that we're delivering. We can go and deliver services without having these accreditations, but we chose to put the work in, and proofs in the pudding, we got the accreditation.

We had to go through a really rigorous assessment. We had visits from SafeLives. They spoke to staff, they spoke to our board, they spoke to people from all over the domestic abuse part of Stonewater to understand that what we're saying we're doing is actually what's happening on the ground floor.

It was everything from how we're governed. It's our policies and our procedures, how they line up with our other policies, procedures across the business. How we involve our survivors who are accessing our services in our feedback models, and also how they shape the future delivery of our service. We had to look at what our... More than just a buzzword, how are we being trauma-informed? How are we being person-centred and providing evidence of that and staff having to provide evidence of that? They looked at our case management system to make sure that what we're saying we're doing is being recorded because that record keeping is so important. Just looking at everything to make sure that we are doing things in a safe, effective and survivor-led way.

But like I said earlier, it's not just about having that badge and that logo on the website. It's a pretty logo, don't get me wrong. But for us, it's about the accountability and that continuous improvement. I am a domestic abuse professional. It's where my passion is. It's where my career will always be. I want to work for a company that has that credibility, and Stonewater absolutely does. It makes me proud to work here. I know that the rest of our staff team feel the same way.

It motivates us as well to keep on pushing forward and to keep asking, "How can we do things better? How can we do things right for our survivors and for our staff team?" And to make sure that when we're meeting those needs, we're doing it with the compassion and care that we'd want for our best friend and our family members if they were going through this same thing.

I think ultimately, it's sending that message to survivors, most importantly, to commissioners, to our colleagues on the front line and our refuge managers, to our colleagues across the sector that we are taking this seriously. Yes, we're a housing provider. We've got lots of general needs properties, but actually, we're not just a housing provider.

We are offering domestic abuse services, and that isn't like an on-the-side business. It's our bread and butter, and it's something that we're proud to do. We're doing it properly, and we're committed to getting it right. Massively proud of that Leading Light accreditation. I just think it shows the hard work that's going on across our services. Massive well done to the team as well.

Paula Palmer

Well done, Sarah. That's great. I can feel your passion coming through the speakers there. Like Vicky said, you've taken the accreditation, not for the badge, like you said, but for the opportunity it gave you to improve services and look at deep down how they were being delivered. We have talked a lot today about preventative design, supported housing for all ages. But before we wrap up, let's have one final thought from each of you. I'm going to start with Jeremy, and I'm going to say, what's the one thing you think society most underestimates about the value of supported housing?

Jeremy Porteus

I think the one thing that stands out for me is that it's actually a home for many people. It's not a special home, it's actually my home. We need to make sure we don't put it in a box of special needs. We need to make sure that it's an ordinary home for all of us to lead as ordinary a life as we can, whether we need some support, whether we can manage on our own. But ultimately, it's our home. It's trying to demystify our supported living market and make sure people think it not as a market, but as a home.

Paula Palmer

It's just a nicely provisioned home with somebody in the background waiting to give that help that is needed.

Jeremy Porteus

Yes, unfortunately, we often have to give things label, but we need to make sure that that's something that people understand and want, and it's not seen as something out there.

Paula Palmer

Let's go to Vicky.

Vicky Chase

I would echo a little bit about what Jeremy says, that actually we are communities. We're not hostels. We're not just here for a couple of days, a couple of nights. We are long-term homes for some people. We're not forever, but we are long-term homes. We are communities. People that come in to live here, they're not just stand-alone, they're not isolated in their rooms. They live together as part of a living organism, a living community. I think what people underestimate here is there's a lot of love and respect for each other within these homes. I think people do underestimate that they are friends, and they will carry those friendships into their lives even after they've left here.

Paula Palmer

Thanks, Vicky. How about you, Sarah?

Sarah Pugh

I would say that society underestimates how crucial supported housing is in long-term recovery. I spoke about it earlier, it's not just about having a roof over the head, right, jobs are good, then let's move on. It's not just short-term safety, like I say, is that long-term recovery. It's certainly in domestic abuse, there's that assumption once someone has left the abuser, that the danger has passed and the risk has passed. What we know in terms of domestic abuse is leaving is the riskiest time. Survivors and young people and older people might be dealing with trauma or isolation, financial hardship, fear.

The supported housing offers a safe place to sleep 100%. But it also gives a space to process things that have happened to them, rebuild their confidence, access support that they might not otherwise know about unless you've got a member of staff on site talking to you about it, and start making empowered choices about the future. It's the difference between surviving and recovering, and I think that's really important. Without that, people might return back to unsafe situations. They might go on to have new and harmful, equally more so harmful experiences, and never truly regained control of their lives in the way that they can if they are accessing support in supported housing. It's what turns a crisis into an opportunity for lasting change. I think that's sometimes what society fails to see.

Paula Palmer

Brilliant. I have got a complete new appreciation for everything that goes into supported housing, the impact it makes, the work that you do. Brilliant. Thanks so much to all my guests today. To Jeremy, Vicky, and Sarah. Thank you to everybody listening to *On the Air*. If you've enjoyed this episode, do subscribe, rate, or share. We'll be back soon with more stories from the people making a difference across housing and our communities.