



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rebuilding Lives: Resident and Provider
Perspectives on Getting the Supported
Housing Act Right





About Emmaus in the UK

Emmaus is a nationwide movement of local charities that empowers people to overcome homelessness.

We provide the foundation of a home and a life-changing package of tailored support. We're here for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, supporting more than 1,000 people every year. We see the person and their strengths – and help them get their life back on track, based on the future they want to create.

We equip people with valuable skills, training and work experience to achieve their goals. No one's life should be defined by homelessness. In our caring communities, we build on each individual's abilities, increasing their confidence and self-esteem.

The people we support have a purpose and a chance to make a real contribution to their community. Our charity shops, cafes and food growing projects give people opportunities for work experience and social interaction.

Across the UK, Emmaus communities and social enterprises are a vital part of their local areas. Our charity shops are a place to find affordable furniture, household items, clothing, toys and more. We give new life to preloved items – reducing waste and promoting reuse. Emmaus UK is the nationwide homelessness charity that supports and connects local Emmaus charities. In everything we do, we bring people together, amplifying their voices and experiences to prevent homelessness for good.

We are also part of the global Emmaus movement for social change – operating in more than 40 countries across the world. Working together, and with your support, we're ending homelessness one person at a time.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express deep thanks to Lloyds Bank Foundation for providing funding to Emmaus UK, without which this project would not have been possible.



Working collaboratively with other organisations funded by Lloyds Bank Foundation has enabled us to learn from others and to explore how we can most effectively amplify the voices of those with lived experience in policymaking. We would also like to thank Mrs Mabel Oh for her generous legacy donation which supports Emmaus UK's research and evaluation work, including to contribute to this project.

We would also like to thank the participants who gave their time to take part in the research. This includes residents and staff in Emmaus supported housing, as well as those in several other small supported housing services. These include Tonic Housing, Arc, Handcrafted, The Grange Centre, Solo Housing, BHT Sussex, The Connection at St Martin's, and the Cardinal Hume Centre.

We are grateful to all the research participants for sharing so openly with us their experiences and opinions, which have shaped the findings and recommendations in this report.

Our research was co-delivered with five Emmaus resident peer researchers whose lived experience was central to the work and our aim of influencing implementation of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act.

**We thank our volunteers
Peter Swords, Rosemary
Blazekovic, David McCarrick,
Emma Hall, and John Jarrett
for shaping and bringing
the research to life.**

The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act 2023 presents a rare and important opportunity to reset the supported housing system in England.

It has cross-party support, clear public backing, and a strong policy objective: to drive out rogue provision, raise standards, and ensure public funding delivers safe housing and meaningful support for people with a wide range of support needs.

The Act aims to achieve this through new national standards and a licensing regime for supported housing.

Implemented well, the Act offers a genuine chance to overhaul a supported housing sector that has long been under strain – driving out poor practice, restoring confidence in the system, and ensuring that supported housing plays a decisive role in preventing and ending homelessness. At a time when rough sleeping is at record levels and thousands of people are trapped in temporary accommodation, this role has never been more important.

However, without proportionate implementation and adequate resourcing, there is a real risk that the Act could destabilise high-quality provision, reduce the amount of support available, and push more people into the devastation of homelessness.

Drawing on Emmaus UK's expertise in supported housing provision, peer-led research with residents and staff, and engagement with supported housing providers and a wide range of housing and homelessness organisations, this report centres lived experience in shaping practical, deliverable recommendations for national and local government.

While much of the report focuses on the supported housing sector as a whole, our own role as a provider of supported accommodation for people who have experienced homelessness means there are some research insights and recommendations focused on homelessness specifically.

The central message of the report is clear. The Act's success will depend not only on regulation, but on how it is funded, administered and aligned with wider housing and homelessness policy.

This report sets out how that opportunity can be realised – and what risks must be mitigated to ensure it is.

1

Strengthen the National Supported Housing Standards and Principles to reflect what drives quality

There is strong support from residents and providers for the government's proposed national standards, particularly in relation to person-centred support, empowerment and collaboration with external services. These principles provide a credible foundation for reform.

Our research has, however, identified critical gaps that must be addressed in government guidance to ensure the standards reflect the essential elements of high-quality supported accommodation, as identified by residents.

A sense of purpose and meaningful activity



The big one for me was that the residents have a purpose. In other shelters I've been to, they're just shelters... The thing that makes this community really good, mentally, is the work side of things.

- Emmaus resident

Key Findings

Residents consistently linked structured activity, including learning, training and work experience, to improved mental health, reduced substance misuse, greater stability and successful move-on.

Recommendation

The current draft standards should more explicitly recognise purposeful activity as a core driver of recovery and independence. There needs to be government guidance clarifying how this can be delivered in practice and resources to help providers achieve this.

Community and social connection



It's a huge part of Emmaus, you're never lonely. Even if you're by yourself, you're not alone.

- Emmaus resident

Key Findings

Residents described community and peer support as protective factors against isolation and relapse. For many, supported accommodation is not simply a housing intervention, but a space of belonging and reintegration following homelessness.

Recommendation

The standards currently understate the importance of a sense of community and social connection. The guidance should expand the definition of 'support' to include community-building and social connection as features of quality provision.

Security and stability in accommodation

There're some places where you move in [and] you're at a two-year maximum. So, you're fighting against the system straightaway to get jobs, get this, get that within two years, and then you're out. What if you're not sorted [by then]?

- Emmaus resident

Key Findings

Residents emphasised that recovery requires time and stability. In some areas, the two-year intended duration for transitional accommodation is being interpreted as a fixed limit, undermining person-centred delivery and increasing repeat homelessness.

Recommendation

Rigid enforcement risks unintended outcomes, including cycling individuals back into homelessness and crisis services. Guidance should clarify nationally that two years is an intention, not a limit. Local flexibility should allow longer stays where appropriate for person-centred support or where there is no affordable move-on housing available.



Getting 'local need' right

“People coming out of recovery, for example, coming out of detox or rehab, you know it’s not beneficial for them to go back to where they have a local connection.”

- Staff member at a charity supporting people experiencing homelessness

Key Findings

The 'local need' requirement has the potential to support evidence-based planning. Without clear national parameters, however, it risks restrictive application through rigid local connection criteria.

Recommendation

To meet specific individual need or where specialist provision (eg LGBTQ+, disability-focused services) is not available in every area, local connection tests must not block access to support. Guidance on the Act should include pragmatic explanation of local connection.

2**Design a licensing regime that protects quality without reducing supply****Key Findings**

Linking licensing to compliance with national standards is appropriate and widely supported; however, implementation risks must be carefully managed. Supported housing providers, particularly smaller and non-commissioned organisations that do not receive public funding, are operating under severe financial strain. The additional administrative and staffing requirements associated with evidencing compliance put additional strain on sector capacity.

In a context where one in three supported housing providers reported housing site or scheme closures last year due to funding pressures, regulatory design cannot be divorced from funding reality. Without transitional support, providers may be forced to divert resources away from frontline support to meet compliance demands, undermining the very standards the Act seeks to strengthen.

Key recommendations

- Provide transition funding for supported housing providers, alongside the additional funding already being given to local authorities.
- Avoid duplicating regulatory requirements for providers already regulated by bodies including the Regulator of Social Housing and Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- Ensure providers have access to government workforce development programmes to help meet the Act's staffing requirements.
- Provide proportionate improvement timeframes before licence refusal.
- Ensure clear implementation timelines, particularly for housing schemes involving complex landlord or managing agent arrangements.

3**Ensuring national consistency****Key Findings**

Although the supported housing standards are national, licensing will be locally administered. Without stronger national frameworks, there is a significant risk of inconsistency.

Providers have raised concerns about:

- discretionary licence conditions;
- variable licence fee levels;
- differing approaches and methodologies for local needs assessments;
- unclear appeals processes;
- inconsistent definitions of 'scheme', particularly for dispersed models.

Fragmentation would increase administrative burden, reduce confidence in the licensing regime, and undermine fairness.

Key recommendations

- Establish an independent, standardised appeals mechanism.
- Remove the ability of local authorities to set discretionary conditions and different licence fee rates.
- Set out a standardised, national methodology for local needs assessments.
- Provide clarity on the definition of 'scheme', including enabling group licences for providers operating similar dispersed schemes within a local authority area.
- Maintain clear communication channels between providers and national government during rollout.

Consistency will be critical to maintaining providers' stability and ensuring that homelessness does not increase.

4

Avoid cost-cutting incentives

Key Findings

Current Housing Benefit subsidy arrangements create disincentives for local authorities to work with non-registered providers, regardless of quality. Once national standards are in place, compliance, not provider registration status, should determine whether a scheme can operate.

Key recommendations:

Cross-departmental involvement in licensing decisions at local authority level will be essential to ensure decisions are based on quality and need rather than cost pressures.

5

Mitigate the risk of increased homelessness following the implementation of the Act

Key Findings

A persistent concern raised by residents and staff is what happens if schemes fail to secure a licence. Without clear national and local contingency arrangements, there is a real risk of residents being displaced from vital supported accommodation if a scheme's licence application were rejected. This risk is particularly acute for residents who have experienced homelessness, where local authorities may not owe a statutory rehousing duty.

Key recommendations:

- Introduce an improvement period of six months for minor breaches of the Act, during which residents continue to receive the Supported Exempt Accommodation rates of Housing Benefit.
- Require local supported housing strategies to include clear contingency and rehousing pathways.
- Clarify the responsibilities for local authorities to support residents whose supported accommodation closes due to licence refusal.

The implementation of the Act must not destabilise residents with clear support needs in pursuit of regulatory compliance.

“The worrying thing is if we don't meet the standards and then you get closed down, what are they going to do to then? What's going to happen to these guys that are still [here] or they're just going to be dispersed to manage. There you go, manage on your own now.”

- Supported accommodation staff member

6

Align the Act with the wider policy environment

Key Findings

The Act cannot succeed in isolation. The supported housing sector has experienced substantial long-term funding reductions, increasing demand, workforce shortages and a lack of affordable move-on housing. There is a wider set of structural policy challenges that exist, making it harder for the aims of the Act to be realised and, in particular, for residents to move on from supported housing successfully.

Residents' ability to move on depends on:

- access to genuinely affordable social housing;
- greater affordability in the private rented sector, including through the unfreezing of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates so that the cheapest 30% of properties in an area are affordable for those in receipt of welfare benefits;
- availability of a wide range of support services so residents can continue to rebuild their lives after supported housing, including mental health, addiction and employment support services.

Without action on these wider government policies, the impact of regulatory reform via the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act will be limited.

Key recommendations

- Ensure sustainable, ringfenced funding for supported housing.
- Provide emergency funding to prevent further scheme closures as the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act comes into force.
- Expand social housing provision across the country, working towards a target of building 90,000 homes per year, and give priority access to supported housing residents.
- Increase national investment in support services including mental health, addiction, and employment support, and create a local directory of support services in each area.

Having that consistency of income and finding an actual home to move into have been the biggest challenges. I've been on a housing waiting list for over a year and I'm looking at other options that will be affordable.

- Supported accommodation resident

Conclusion

The Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act offers a critical opportunity to strengthen provision for people with additional housing needs, but regulation alone will not deliver improved outcomes.

The Act will succeed if it is implemented with:

**STRENGTHENED
NATIONAL
STANDARDS;**

**FAIR AND
CONSISTENT
LICENSING;**

**REMOVAL OF
COST-CUTTING
FINANCIAL INCENTIVES;**

**ALIGNMENT WITH
WIDER HOUSING AND
FUNDING POLICY.**

**SAFEGUARDS TO
PREVENT INCREASED
HOMELESSNESS;**

**TRANSITIONAL FUNDING
FOR PROVIDERS AS THE ACT
COMES INTO FORCE;**

If implemented without these additional measures, there is a risk that residents in supported housing will not get the support they desperately need because of reduced capacity and destabilisation across the sector. For residents who have experienced homelessness, this could mean a return to the devastation of homelessness.

The implementation of the Act offers an opportunity to ensure that reform not only raises standards on paper, but strengthens supported housing in practice – delivering safety, stability and long-term opportunity for the people who rely on it.



**FULL
RECOMMENDATIONS**

For national government

1

Strengthen the National Supported Housing Standards and Principles

- Amend the 'person-centred support standard' to explicitly require purposeful activity, including learning, training and work opportunities, as a core component of high-quality supported housing. Guidance must give practical examples of delivery, with resources provided to support this delivery.
- Amend the 'empowerment standard' to explicitly link empowerment with purpose, participation and progression.
- Expand the definition of 'support' within national guidance to formally recognise a sense of community, peer-to-peer support and social connection as important elements of supported accommodation.
- Issue clear national clarification that the two-year recommendation for the length of stay in short-term transitional accommodation is an intention, not a cap, and amend relevant Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Housing Benefit guidance to prevent the introduction of de facto time limits.
- Publish a standardised national methodology for local authorities to use when assessing 'local need'. This would follow on from the initial framework for needs assessments included in the government's guidance to local authorities on developing local strategies.
- A pragmatic approach to local connection should be promoted so people can access the support they need regardless of local links.
- Set out explicitly how supported housing residents will access national employment and skills programmes, including Connect to Work and other initiatives under the National Plan to End Homelessness.

2

Protect residents and prevent repeat homelessness

- Require that residents are protected through:
 - continued benefit entitlement during improvement periods;
 - defined transition arrangements;
 - requiring local authorities to clearly set out how they will support residents of schemes that close down having lost their licence.
- Use the Lived Experience Forum under the National Plan to End Homelessness to review the impact of the Act on residents.

3

Deliver a fair, proportionate and consistent licensing regime

- Remove duplication in regulatory requirements by establishing tailored arrangements for providers already regulated by bodies such as the Regulator of Social Housing and CQC. Such arrangements have already been put in place for supported housing schemes regulated by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).
- Provide transitional funding for providers to meet licensing requirements, alongside the already confirmed funding being given to local authorities to help them with the new burdens of the Act.
- Integrate the National Workforce Programme with the implementation of the Supported Housing (Regulatory Oversight) Act. Ensure the Programme directly addresses staffing requirements created by the new standards and consider extending it to the supported housing sector as a whole, not only homelessness organisations.
- Establish a mandatory, transparent and standardised national appeals process that allows for independent review of licensing decisions.
- Remove local authorities' power to apply discretionary licence conditions and set a national, standardised licence fee to prevent inconsistent or excessive local requirements.
- Amend the definition of 'scheme' to enable group licences for dispersed accommodation within a single local authority area.
- Create formal national communication channels between Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (MHCLG) and providers to monitor implementation and resolve inconsistency across local authorities.
- Reinstate supported accommodation subsidies for non-registered providers, ensuring licensing decisions are based on compliance and need rather than financial disincentives.
- Introduce a formal improvement period for minor breaches of the Act, during which residents continue to receive Supported Exempt Accommodation rates of Housing Benefit for six months while providers address compliance issues.

4

Secure the long-term sustainability of supported housing

- Establish a long-term funding settlement for supported housing within the forthcoming housing strategy. This needs to be a widespread funding package that addresses the long-term decimation of funding for the sector, building on the £124 million announced in the National Plan to End Homelessness.
- Provide emergency funding to prevent further scheme closures as the Act comes into force.
- Accelerate delivery of social and affordable housing, working toward building 90,000 social homes per year, to create affordable move-on options for supported housing residents.
- Restore Local Housing Allowance rates to cover at least the lowest 30% of market rents, preventing displacement into unaffordable private accommodation.

For local authorities

1

Embed quality in local strategy and commissioning

- Embed purposeful activity, progression and community connection as quality benchmarks within supported housing strategies and commissioning frameworks.
- Apply the two-year length of stay recommendation for short-term transitional housing flexibly in line with person-centred delivery and state this approach clearly in local strategies.
- Be transparent and share the methodology for local needs assessments with providers in the area.
- Ensure local connection policies do not exclude individuals who need support.
- Commission and recognise specialist provision, including services for LGBTQ+ people and other groups where unmet need is evidenced. Support access to services across local authority boundaries, when local connection is lacking.
- Develop supported housing strategies in genuine partnership with providers and residents, including accessible consultation forums.

You have to have a two-year connection to be able to register for local authority housing. We've just been told that they're changing it to a five-year connection. Out of 22 residents, there's probably three that have a five-year connection.

- Emmaus staff member

2

Implement licensing requirements proportionately and transparently

- Provide a six-month improvement period following any improvement notice, before refusing a licence, to recognise the challenges providers face in meeting the Act's requirements and reduce the risk of increased homelessness.
- Publish clear implementation timelines with sufficient notice for providers. These timeframes should take into account the complex arrangements between landlords and managing agents that apply in some schemes, and contract renegotiations that will need to take place.
- Deliver structured training, toolkits and provider forums to support provider compliance. Equip providers with an effective and high-quality self-assessment tool, such as the Emmaus Quality Standards (EQS) developed by Emmaus UK.
- Ensure cross-departmental involvement in licensing decisions, preventing cost-driven decisions by Housing Benefit teams.

3

Strengthen move-on pathways and prevent homelessness

- Include clear contingency planning in local strategies for schemes that fail to secure a licence.
- Set out defined move-on pathways from supported housing in local strategies, and support residents to access:
 - affordable housing;
 - transitional support as they move on from supported housing; and
 - links to a wide range of services, including health and employment.
- Review local allocation policies to prioritise supported housing residents who are ready to move on. This could be achieved through priority banding or direct lets.
- Publish and maintain a directory of local support services and encourage providers to engage with wider services to meet resident need.



The peer researchers involved in Emmaus UK's research project, alongside Emmaus staff and sector partners, at the Emmaus National Assembly 2025

**WANT TO
LEARN MORE ?**

READ THE FULL REPORT ►



Emmaus UK Apex House, 3 Embassy Drive,
Calthorpe Road, Birmingham, B15 1TR

t: 0300 303 7555

e: contact@emmaus.org.uk

EMMAUS.ORG.UK