



MEDIA RELEASE

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New research aims to improve Universal Credit claims for thousands of homeless people

New research, commissioned by Riverside, St Mungo's, YMCA and The Salvation Army, could challenge current government thinking that housing costs for supported housing cannot remain within the welfare system. The study will seek to identify practical solutions to make Universal Credit work more effectively for vulnerable people who depend on supported housing.

The study has been triggered by the Government consultation on changes to the way supported housing is funded in the future. Proposals include no longer supporting basic housing costs for short-term supported housing, such as homeless hostels, through the benefit system but switching to local grant funding managed by local authorities instead.

The four providers – who are responsible for more than a quarter of short-term supported housing in the UK – have raised concerns that this change would threaten the future of housing and support for vulnerable people, including people who are homeless and those with complex needs.

Localised discretionary funding would put the long-term viability of such schemes at risk, with some lenders warning they would be reluctant to finance this type of development, including investment in upgrades and improvements.

Instead, the group is urging the Government to continue funding housing costs through the main welfare system wherever possible – either through a modified version of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit – and improve the claims process, building on Trusted Partner arrangements which are already in place with some landlords.

Jonathon Graham of The Salvation Army said “At a time when homelessness is on the rise, we hope the Government will re-think its plans. It is vital that housing costs for short-term supported housing are kept in the main welfare system, as with other forms of supported and sheltered housing.

“If the Government moves to a localised funding system, we are concerned about both existing provision and future supply of homeless hostels.”

Hugh Owen, Director of Strategy and Public Affairs at Riverside, added: “These are some of the country’s most vulnerable people who are likely to find it particularly difficult to establish and maintain a Universal Credit claim.

“They’re more likely to be digitally excluded and have problems proving their identity in order to successfully make a claim, which is often a vital step to rebuilding their lives. If we can find effective solutions for this group, there is likely to be wider benefits for other vulnerable UC claimants.”

Undertaking the research is an independent company called Policy in Practice, run by Deven Ghelani who helped create Universal Credit while working at the Centre for Social Justice.

The 10-week study will include talking to tenants claiming Universal Credit, and staff working at homeless schemes, other housing associations and Job Centre Plus. Looking at the claims process and tenancy data, the research will aim to provide practical solutions to make UC work more effectively for this group of vulnerable tenants.

Findings from the research are expected to be published in May.

Ends

For additional information please contact Linda Guest by emailing mediaoffice@riverside.org.uk or for out of hours enquiries please contact the customer service centre on 0345 111 0000.

Notes to editors

Riverside

- Riverside is one of the UK’s leading social housing, regeneration, and care and support organisations, owning or managing around 55,000 homes from Irvine in Scotland to Kent. We have a track record of transforming lives and revitalising neighbourhoods dating back to 1928.
- For more information visit www.riverside.org.uk
- Follow us on:
 - Twitter: @RiversideUK
 - Facebook: www.facebook.com/RiversideHousing

The Salvation Army

- The Salvation Army is an international Christian church and registered charity which has been transforming lives throughout the last 150 years. Working in 128 countries worldwide The Salvation Army offers friendship, practical help and support for people

at all levels of need. In the UK and Republic of Ireland this work includes more than 800 community churches and social centres.

- For more information visit the website www.salvationarmy.org.uk

St Mungo's

St Mungo's provides a bed and support to more than 2,700 people a night who are either homeless or at risk, and works to prevent homelessness. We support men and women through more than 300 projects including emergency support and outreach for people sleeping rough, hostel and supportive housing projects, advice services, specialist physical health, mental health and skills and work services. We believe in our clients' potential and are committed to every individual's sustainable recovery.

www.mungos.org

YMCA

YMCA was established in 1844, and is the largest and oldest youth charity in the world, helping more than 58 million people in 119 countries. Here in England and Wales, YMCA operates in almost 740 different communities, impacting upon the lives of more than 630,000 people every year. This includes providing a home to more than 18,000 people experiencing homelessness each year. For further information please visit www.ymca.org.uk