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# Improving lives through linked data: Views from groups with complex needs

Homelessness Pilot

Audience summary report

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## Executive summary

The Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD) project is a three-year, cross-Government pilot programme, created to demonstrate how individuals with complex needs can be better supported by the Government through linking and improving data in a safe, secure and ethical way. BOLD is sharing and linking a range of social policy datasets from across government to drive new evidence and insight, and better understand how services delivered in one part of government impact on outcomes in another.

To ensure that BOLD delivers for the individuals with complex needs that it aims to serve, four projects have been identified that could deliver the greatest impact with the highest probability of success. The four key vulnerability projects chosen are: Homelessness, Substance Misuse, Reducing Reoffending and Victim Pathways. In order to demonstrate what BOLD will involve in practice, each project has developed 'use cases' which outline key research questions and the data sets that will be used to investigate these.

As part of a commitment to put data ethics at the heart of its delivery, and to support transparency and public engagement, BOLD and the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation commissioned this piece research with the overarching aim of informing how to take the BOLD programme forward, by engaging and consulting with the relevant audiences.

The research has engaged 18 people with lived experience of homelessness, alongside 4 third sector support services, and the high-level findings are provided below. This report focusses specifically on the research with the group of participants discussing homelessness, including those with lived experience and the organisations that support them, henceforth shortened to homelessness audience in this report.

## Key findings

- 1. Overall, participants in the Homelessness audience are receptive to the principle of data sharing and can see how this could improve public services.** Many participants reflect on personal experiences where sharing information would have led to better outcomes, particularly in relation to health and housing services.
- 2. Participants are generally positive about the BOLD programme.** This audience is particularly interested in the role that BOLD could play in supporting people to transition out of homelessness for good. Their personal and anecdotal experience has demonstrated the links between homelessness, substance use issues and spending time in prison, and therefore are very receptive to initiatives that seek to disrupt these patterns.
- 3. However, participants are sceptical about the impact BOLD is likely to have.** Many participants are distrusting of public services and the 'system' more broadly, often based on poor past experiences and perceived system inefficiencies. This means that, while they feel BOLD could provide evidence to support better outcomes, they are sceptical about the tangible impact that BOLD will have for people like them.
- 4. The use cases proposed by BOLD largely feel relevant and important for this audience.** Participants are able to relate to at least one of the use cases and know of

many others with similar experiences of substance use, leaving prison and repeat homelessness.

- 5. Participants are most concerned about data sharing leading to information being used 'against' them when seeking to access services.** Participants are particularly sensitive towards mention of the Ministry of Justice within the use cases, as those with offending histories worry that this will impact their application for housing.

## **Considerations for communicating BOLD with the Homelessness audience**

- 1. Offer clarity on how BOLD will ensure the anonymity of the data being linked, as this goes a long way to reassure concerns.** Participants have strong initial concerns about consent, which are often assuaged by receiving clarity on anonymity, as assurances that BOLD will not be used for the purposes of ongoing surveillance.
- 2. Emphasise the role that BOLD will be playing in evidencing patterns across intersecting experiences.** Participants have plenty of anecdotal evidence of this, such as the prevalence of homelessness amongst prison leavers. Reiterating that BOLD will be seeking to evidence this anecdotal evidence will prevent the programme from being perceived as 'naïve' or not worthwhile.
- 3. While use cases should investigate intersecting experiences, they should clarify that this information will not be used 'against' people.** Participants are particularly sensitive about their personal information being used to prevent them from accessing services, such as housing, and seek reassurances that BOLD will not detrimentally impact individuals in this way.
- 4. Example use cases should lead with the role that BOLD will have in ultimately helping people to transition out of homelessness.** This is the most compelling benefit of BOLD, and participants are particularly engaged with the ways in which BOLD will seek to address the 'root causes' of homelessness.

***Note: the findings in this report reflect the views expressed by participants who took part in this research.***

## Background and methodology

### Background and objectives

The BOLD project is a three-year cross government pilot programme, created to demonstrate how individuals with complex needs can be better supported by removing barriers across government and linking and improving data in a safe, secure and ethical way. To ensure that BOLD delivers for the individuals with complex needs it aims to serve, four projects have been identified that could deliver the greatest impact with the highest probability of success. The four key vulnerability projects chosen are:

- Homelessness
- Substance Use
- Reducing Reoffending
- Victim Pathways

BOLD and the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation commissioned this piece of research with the overarching aim of engaging and consulting with the relevant audiences, including people who have lived experience, for the BOLD project to help inform how we take the programme forward.

The specific aims of the research were to:

- Gain **feedback** to improve and refine **how BOLD delivers** the four pilot projects, in particular in relation to determining acceptable uses and forms of analysis of shared data
- Inform **how BOLD communicates** about the aims of the programme, and the progress it will make to the relevant audiences, in order to be as **clear and transparent** as possible in what BOLD are doing
- Understand how the ways in which BOLD manages data **impact on how much trust there is** in the programme.

### Methodology

Our overall approach consisted of the following stages:



#### *Intermediary organisation workshops*

We conducted workshops with expert intermediary organisations, such as charities, who have a deep understanding of each of the audiences' attitudes and needs.

The purpose of these sessions was to:

- **Explain the purpose of the project to the intermediary organisations, covering:**
  - The proposed approach for the project
  - The specific methodologies to be used for their audience, including specific groups within this audience
  - Run through the initial draft materials
  - The role we would be asking them to play in the recruitment of participants for fieldwork
- **Gain their feedback on the approach and materials**
  - We built in time for this to ensure that the organisations had an opportunity to have their perspective on this heard, particularly in relation to the BOLD use cases
  - Ensuring that our research approach was ethically informed and considerate of practical considerations relevant for each audience (e.g. setting for fieldwork activities likely to ensure the most engagement).

The following organisations participated in the intermediary workshop for the Homelessness audience:

- Crisis
- St Basils
- Centrepont
- Thames Reach

### **Fieldwork**

We engaged with a total of **18 participants** across the Homelessness audience over the course of the fieldwork period, using a combination of methods to ensure full participation from a range of individuals with differing levels of need.

The fieldwork activities conducted for this audience is outlined below:

	Homelessness
<b>Stage 1</b>	<p><b>2-hour online pilot workshop with 5 participants</b> with lived experience of homelessness. Participants were all engaged with support services through an intermediary organisation.</p> <p>This initial phase enabled us to gain feedback in a group setting and to ascertain whether our research materials would be suitable for lower confidence participants in each audience. We then had the opportunity to refine our materials before the second stage of fieldwork</p>
<b>Stage 2</b>	<p><b>Online community with 13 participants</b>, following the same content as the Stage 1 interviews.</p> <p>Gaining feedback through set tasks and response activities.</p>

***Note on our approach:** based on feedback gained in the pilot workshops, we were not required to adapt our materials for the second stage of research, as all information and activities were clear and useful in the sessions.*

### **Sampling**

Given the sensitivities and nuances associated with the homelessness group and based on our experience of conducting research with these audiences, it was agreed that we would work with the intermediary organisations to recruit participants for the research. We developed a recruitment screener, which was shared with intermediary organisations, enabling them to reach out to their networks as a trusted voice to find potential participants.

### **Achieved sample**

Below is an overview of the achieved sample across this audience:

	<b>Homelessness</b>
<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>5 x participants</b> with lived experience of homelessness. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● 2 x men, 2 x women, 1 x non-binary person</li><li>● All aged 18-22, as participants were engaged through a youth homelessness charity</li><li>● Mix of ethnicities</li><li>● All located in the West Midlands</li></ul>
<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>13 x participants</b> with lived experience of homelessness. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● 10 x men, 3 x women</li><li>● Range of ages (from 31-75)</li><li>● Mix of ethnicities</li><li>● Mix of locations in the UK (incl. England, Wales and Scotland)</li></ul>

**Note on intersecting vulnerabilities:** based on our sessions with the intermediary organisations, we anticipated that it would be very likely that our participants would have experience of more than one of the four vulnerabilities mentioned. This did become apparent during the research as participants, though recruited with a focus on one specific vulnerability project, spontaneously shared experiences across multiple vulnerabilities.



## Context

*Engagement with participants throughout the research surfaced contextual themes which, while not derived from direct lines of questioning, were influencing participants' responses to data linking and the BOLD programme. This section highlights the most relevant of these contextual themes for the homelessness audience.*

**Those experiencing homelessness share a significant amount of overlapping experiences with the other audiences, often spontaneously referencing their experiences in these areas.**

- Participants describe experiences across the other pilot areas, with many describing personal struggles with substance use issues, being a victim of crime, and spending time in prison.
- These issues are also spontaneously attributed with causing people to fall into homelessness, such as addiction issues leading to relationship breakdowns, or domestic violence leading to people fleeing their homes.

*“A lot of people that have been homeless do have a criminal record and a good chunk of people that have been homeless who have issues with alcohol and drugs, it's very normalised in shelters, there will be a resident dealer.”*

**Participants note the social stigma that they themselves, and others experiencing homelessness, endure on a daily basis, even in the context of seeking support.**

- Many participants feel that society holds stereotyping and stigmatising attitudes towards homeless people, such as assuming that they also have addiction issues.
- Those experiencing homelessness are particularly distrusting of the authorities and the 'system' more broadly, often due to experiences of feeling stigmatised and/or being treated poorly by these institutions.
  - This is felt to be particularly true for those who are leaving prison, or have addiction issues, and are felt to receive little support from the 'system' – often resulting in them falling into homelessness.

*“We don't support homelessness in our society. Being homeless is treated like an offence.”*

*“Drugs is factor which place individuals in situations of Homelessness., as well as prison leavers having no help upon release.”*

*“Data linking could be really amazing for homeless people, but it is important to be very careful with what data is linked and not use irrelevant data which could get people's backs up. Some people, especially on the street, are scared of sharing information.”*

**Those experiencing homelessness are likely to have engaged with a range of different public services to meet their needs.**

- This range of interactions often stems from the fact that many homeless people have multiple complex needs, such as mental health and addiction issues.

- Participants say they have the most frequent interactions with the housing, benefits and health systems. A few participants also cite interactions with emergency services and the police.
- Furthermore, participants reference (largely positive) experiences of engaging with charities, such as the Salvation Army, local homelessness charities and religious organisations.

*“Local homeless charities, the Salvation Army and local council helped me off the streets and are supporting me in my home. A mental health organization is helping me to get back to some sort of normal life.”*

**Participants feel there are clear improvements that could be made by better ‘joined up’ services, particularly in relation to housing, health and benefits.**

- Participants do note that they have observed services making better use of ‘IT’ and digitisation more broadly e.g. accessing and recording service user information via digital platforms.
- However, many feel that better sharing of information across services would save time and money from a system perspective, as well as leading to a faster and more seamless experience for service users.

*“Joined-up information databases would be useful when dealing with multiple agencies to avoid repetition. Universal Credit has gone some way to help this in the benefits system.”*

*“The benefits system isn’t very co-ordinated. When they put someone on a programme, they seem to share as little information as possible, leaving the service user to explain their circumstances every time. Some service users seem to struggle with that.”*

**Audience example: Homelessness**

Those who have experienced or are currently homeless spoke about the difficulty in accessing services due to not having a consistent registered address.

For example, one participant spoke about currently living in his car in a borough of London to which he does not have a registered address, with his registered address being elsewhere in the south of England. When attempting to access a mental health support service in this borough, he was told he could not access the service as he was not a resident. This was a critical time for this participant, shortly after which he attempted suicide.

*“It’s difficult to access support when you aren’t consistently registered at one address or under particular details.”*

## Attitudes towards data sharing / linking

*During the research, participants were shown information about what data linking involves, to help build their understanding of this topic and explore their initial response to the concept of their data being used in this way. This section highlights key themes relating to their overall attitudes towards data linking. Full stimulus material shown to participants can be found in the Appendix.*

**Participants are open to the idea of data linking and see clear personal benefits resulting from better sharing of information across public services.**

- In particular, participants highlight the benefit of not having to repeat personal histories at each interaction with public services: having to repeat potentially traumatic journeys into homelessness can be extremely distressing for this audience, with some also feeling that these interactions make them vulnerable to judgment and stigma.
- Participants also feel that data linking could allow services to be better tailored to the individual and make the user experience better as a result.

*“In respect to all public services, it would be great if sharing could happen where appropriate, so you are not continually repeating yourself every time an interaction takes place.”*

*“I have been on the streets 3 times and if services knew about my mental health problems they may have been able to offer me assistance and prevented it happening.”*

### **Audience example: Homelessness**

Participants spoke about the frustration that they experience when up-to-date information about them was not shared across health services in different locations.

One participant described their experience of gender transitioning, and the difficulty they encountered in ensuring that a range of different NHS health services recorded their new identity. They had to make a complaint to their local surgery after requesting them to update their records on multiple occasions. This made them feel frustrated and lacking in control over their own personal information, as well as feeling emotionally triggered at each interaction.

*“Better quality of sharing would have helped me was when I - as an adult and late-in-life gender transitioner - was asking the NHS to update my health records to reflect my change. Various departments, widely spaced in geography and purpose, passed me around without sharing any information about be which I was requesting them to do. I felt that I had little control over what information was held on me and how I might amend it to reflect my change in identity.”*

**However, participants are concerned that data linking could be used to reinforce stereotypes about homeless people.**

- This stems from participants' sensitivity towards the social stigmatisation that they feel homeless people are subjected to.
- Participants are also concerned that data linking could eventually be used for predictive purposes or used 'against' individuals.
  - For example, by identifying that someone was particularly likely to behave negatively based on their data and then using that as a pre-text for denying them services.

**Participants are also concerned about data linking being used for surveillance purposes, reflecting their broader lack of trust in the 'system'.**

- Several participants associate data linking with a potential 'Big Brother' surveillance state, where individuals are singled out and monitored due to their past histories and current circumstances.
- Participants also note that those who are homeless can be reluctant to share information about themselves, particularly in relation to the reasons why they have fallen into homelessness as these can be sensitive (e.g. linked to criminal offences).
- This means that (a minority) of participants are sceptical about the promises that BOLD makes to ensure anonymity.

*"It opens up the prospect of a Big Brother society, where parents are afraid to take their children to the doctor because they're concerned information will be passed on to the school. Social Services could use the information to try to take children into care. It says it is anonymised - but is that really the case? If a professional thought they had detected a crime or a welfare issue, could they unlock the anonymisation? If so, then it's not anonymous. (If not, then why do it in the first place?)"*

*"People are very wary of giving out information as to why they are homeless/rough sleeping."*

**Participants have broader concerns about data sharing and want to be able to consent to their information being shared across public services.**

- The majority of participants feel that people should be able to opt-in to data linking, as opposed to data linking being an opt-out system, to allow individuals to retain choice over what information about them is shared.
- Participants often mention that those experiencing homelessness are particularly sensitive to personal information being shared about them, with several referencing fears of surveillance and/or police interference.
- However, once they receive more information about the BOLD project, and assurances about anonymity, many of these concerned participants feel more comfortable with their data being linked.
- A minority of participants do feel more comfortable with their information being shared, as they feel the benefits of improving services outweigh concerns that they may have about consent.
  - These participants also reference feeling they have 'nothing to hide' within their personal information, though they do acknowledge that they are likely to be a minority within the Homelessness audience.

*“What guarantees can be offered that personal data won’t be used elsewhere or the security of my data?”*

*“Overall, I think sharing data between organisations and services is a good thing. But the extent to which data is shared should be optional. People could be scared about information from their past being shared. It’s down to the individual to how that data should be used.”*

*“I can totally imagine this being a help to my friends who are still out there. And the data aspect would be a small price to pay.”*

**Many participants spontaneously mention concerns about security and seek reassurances of protective measures that would be in place.**

- Participants are aware of the potential for data to be breached, and even sold for malicious intent.
- This is therefore a top-of-mind concern, and they feel reassured when informed of measures that would be in place to avoid security breaches, as well as processes that would be followed to recover any lost or stolen data.

*“One of my concerns was about collecting data and sharing it in an unscrupulous pattern. This has put my mind at ease. I think this is a must going forward and the future of public services.”*

## Responses to the BOLD project

*During the research, participants were shown information about the BOLD project, to explain its purpose and objectives. They were also shown information about what BOLD aims to do in the context of the Homelessness pilot, specifically. This section highlights key themes relating to their response to the BOLD project overall. Full stimulus material shown to participants can be found in the Appendix.*

**Overall, the BOLD project is well received as participants agree with the project's aims of helping service users to achieve better outcomes.**

- In particular, participants are hopeful that BOLD will support people to transition out of homelessness longer-term, which they feel should be the ultimate goal of any support offered to this audience.
- Several participants express surprise that a project similar to BOLD is not currently operating, particularly given that their personal experiences have demonstrated the need for more 'joined up' services.

*"It's definitely good to do research into seeing what can best help them to get on the track to recovery and hopefully not reoffend or relapse is a really good way to prevent homelessness because drugs or crime will put people into a lot of debt and that's more likely to cause homelessness."*

*"I think this would be a good idea and am at a loss to understand why this hasn't happened before."*

**Participants spontaneously note the intersecting nature of homelessness, substance misuse and offending, and welcome BOLD's ambition to better understand these areas.**

- While these intersections may be 'obvious' to participants, they do believe that BOLD's role in evidencing and disrupting the cyclical nature of these circumstances is worthwhile.
- Participants are able to draw on a range of anecdotal and personal examples of how these areas intersect and are therefore acutely aware of the need, and benefit, of addressing them in conjunction.

**However, there are concerns about the potential role that BOLD might play in making decisions about individuals' ability to access services.**

- Participants initially respond to BOLD with the assumption that it will lead to decisions being made about individual cases.
- Participants feel reassured, and less personally targeted by BOLD, once it is explained that the programme will not impact individuals.
- However, they do retain concerns that even aggregate-level analysis of homeless peoples' data will make it difficult for them to access support services, such as if histories of substance misuse are factored into housing decisions.

**Participants are sceptical about whether findings from BOLD will be taken forward by the government in a way which will have real impact and emphasise the need to see tangible 'outcomes' as a result of the programme.**

- Participants often have past experiences of feeling 'let down' by public services, which has made it difficult to transition out of homelessness.
  - For example, waiting for several years on the housing register, or waiting several months before being able to access addiction services or benefits.
- Participants also perceive 'Government' as working inefficiently, with particular reference to state-run projects that have overrun in terms of timing and costs (e.g. HS2), as well as the under-funding of services.
- This contributes to participants' scepticism about the likelihood of tangible actions resulting from BOLD's research, as their experience has shown that services can be slow to offer support – if at all.

*"It's okay researching but if practical help isn't available then it feels pointless to people."*

*"It feels very, very relevant. I just don't get what knowing some of that information will actually do."*

*"The theory is ok - but big data projects are white elephants, they overrun in cost and delivery, by the time this is implemented the next government will be in place."*

#### **Implications for BOLD:**

It will be important to clearly articulate how BOLD's research has, and will, lead to the improved provision of support services for homeless people, in order to build their faith in the programme.

## BOLD use cases

*During the research, participants were shown three example use cases to demonstrate the types of issues that the Homelessness pilot would seek to address, and how BOLD would do this. This section outlines participants' responses to the use cases overall, as well as detailed responses to each use case shown. Full stimulus material shown to participants can be found in the Appendix.*

**Overall, participants feel the three use cases are very relevant and important to examine to help people transition out of homelessness.**

- All participants related to at least one of the use cases, if not more, and knew of many others who could relate to issues of substance use, difficulties transitioning into housing on release from prison and repeat homelessness.
- While participants have their own anecdotal theories as to the causes of these issues, many still saw the utility of BOLD looking into these issues to provide evidence to underpin what they feel is already known.

*“These questions are really good to be honest, they’re asking the how and the what. How is it happening, what is the cause, how can we support? Those are really good.”*

- There were some concerns where participants saw data would be shared with the Ministry of Justice, with participants with offending histories expressing concern that this could be used against them and decrease their chances of finding suitable housing. Explanations that the data would be anonymised helped to alleviate these concerns for many.

**Across all audiences, we have used the following overarching principles to analyse the performance of the BOLD use cases.**

- **Relevance:** case studies should depict scenarios that are recognisable and relevant to target audience groups.
- **Impactful:** examples of BOLD outcomes should clearly explain the positive impacts it might have on the target audience groups.
- **Clear and informative:** case studies should be explicit in how BOLD will and won't use personal data, including clarifications about anonymisation where necessary and what BOLD is aiming to achieve.
- **Non-stigmatising:** care must be taken to avoid any suggestion that BOLD may link negative factors together and increase the stigmatisation that these groups experience on a regular basis.

**Below is an overview of the performance of each use case presented to participants in the substance use audience. The ticks and crosses indicate where the use cases did or did not deliver against each respective principle.**

Use Cases	Principles			
	Relevant	Impactful	Clear and informative	Non-stigmatising



Homelessness				
Use case 1: Rough sleeping and substance use issues	✓	✗	✓	✗
Use case 2: Homelessness and spending time in prison	✓	✓	✗	✗
Use case 3: Repeat homelessness	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Use case 1: Those who are rough sleeping can be more vulnerable to substance use issues. This can make it more difficult to coordinate and deliver support services to influence positive outcomes for rough sleeping homeless people.*

- Participants feel this is a very relevant issue and cited examples of substance use keeping them or people they know from being able to maintain a stable living situation. Many also feel this use case links well with the use case on repeat homelessness, as substance use can be part of this ‘vicious cycle’.

*“This is important. [Substance use issues] can hugely compromise homeless people’s chances of staying off the streets.”*

- Some feel that this use case could be broadened to explore links between substance use leading to rough sleeping or homelessness. These participants want to see BOLD addressing the root of the issue and reflected on their own experiences with addiction as contributing to homelessness.
  - However, others cite their experiences of becoming addicted to substances once homeless, to escape the reality of their situations.
  - Acknowledging both of these relationships between substance use and rough sleeping will make this use case relevant to a wider audience.

*“I think substance use is an issue before people are homeless, because then they’re vulnerable.”*

- However, some feel the link between substance use and homelessness is obvious and that public services are, or should, already be aware of the relationship between receiving adequate treatment for substance use and histories of rough sleeping.
  - Participants also note that mental health support services are not mentioned as part of this issue and feel that this is a key element to helping rough sleepers transition out of substance use and homelessness.

*“You have this data, a first-year sociology student can provide you with it. Lack of funding in drug rehabilitation, lack of police numbers.” (Participant from the Homelessness audience)*

- Others express concern that showing a link between homelessness and substance use could be stigmatising and result in homeless people being denied services.

*“This could lead to discrimination. Perhaps it already happens in certain housing departments but for me it would be a concern.”*

USE CASE 1: Rough sleeping and substance use issues		
	Worked well	Areas for improvement
<b>Relevant</b>	Participants are able to <b>relate this use case to their own experiences</b> or experiences of people they know easily.	Some reflect that in their own experiences, <b>substance use occurred before they became homeless</b> and look to see this reflected in the use case.
<b>Impactful</b>	Participants feel the link between rough sleeping and substance use issues is clear and <b>providing more holistic support</b> across these areas would lead to better outcomes for this audience.	<b>Incorporating mental health support services</b> , alongside housing services and substance use treatment, is felt to be key in helping people to transition out of a vicious cycle of addiction and homelessness.
<b>Clear and informative</b>	This use case is felt to be clear, with <b>the research questions articulating key areas</b> participants feel are important to look into, such as how previous housing situations impact the outcomes of substance use treatment.	Some feel <b>this issue is obvious</b> and that BOLD is not looking into anything new.
<b>Non-stigmatising</b>	Participants acknowledge that rough sleeping and substance use are sometimes linked and that individuals in this situation are likely to experience additional challenges and have <b>additional support needs</b> .	Participants express concern that BOLD could <b>publicly share findings of a link between homelessness and substance use</b> , leading to further stereotyping and potentially a decrease in support for this audience.

*Use case 2: People who have spent time in prison are more likely to become homeless. This suggests that public services are potentially not always being delivered to the right people at the right times to prevent this from happening.*

- Participants feel there is a clear link between time spent in prison and homelessness and do not feel that prison leavers are considered a priority for housing on release.

*“This is true. If you’re a healthy male out of prison and needing a home the local housing authority do not class you as vulnerable.”*

- Participants reflect on personal experiences and those of friends who were unable to access housing on release and subsequently re-offended in order to have a place to stay.

*“This is so important. I know many people who reoffend just to get a place to stay and to feel belonging again... People need to feel that it’s not worth their while reoffending and that does not mean harsher prison sentences!”*

- Participants feel that the outcomes of this use case could be clearer, with the research questions currently feeling more exploratory. Participants are looking to understand what BOLD will do, should a link between time spent in prison and homelessness be evidenced (it is worth noting that as with the other use cases, participants feel this link is obvious to them and others in their situation).

*“You worry about this when you’re in prison. The housing needs to be allocated before you are released.”*

- While there is some understanding about the Ministry of Justice having access to certain data on those who have been in prison, participants are wary of any data sharing relationships that involve the Ministry of Justice. Participants express concern that the Ministry of Justice may share their offending histories with organisations they feel are not relevant and may potentially impact their access to support services.

*“My concern is that council departments or housing departments may discriminate people if they have access to their offending history. I do not believe any officer in housing should have access to this.”*

USE CASE 2: Homelessness and spending time in prison		
	Worked well	Areas for improvement
Relevant	This is very relevant for participants and people they know, with <b>reoffending being an accepted way of accessing housing</b> for some in this situation.	Some have never been to prison and so this did not feel relevant to them. However, most felt it could be relevant for others.
Impactful	Participants who have spent time in prison highlight this use case as resonant with their own	While this is impactful in theory, participants are interested to understand <b>how public services</b>

	experiences and feel that much could have been done to <b>support them in accessing housing on release from prison.</b>	<b>would put this into practice</b> – for example, allocating housing prior to release from prison for those who need it.
<b>Clear and informative</b>	Participants feel there is a <b>clear link</b> to be made between spending time in prison and experiencing homelessness.	Participants are <b>unsure how this use case may lead to better outcomes</b> for those in this situation. They are looking for further clarity on how public services would take these findings on board to provide better support.
<b>Non-stigmatising</b>	Participants acknowledge that a history of offending and homelessness are sometimes linked and that individuals in this situation are likely to experience additional challenges and have <b>additional support needs.</b>	Participants express concern that <b>the Ministry of Justice may share their offending histories with other public services,</b> causing them to be denied access to support.

*Use case 3: Those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, can often struggle to transition out of their situation. Repeat homelessness is an issue that makes it difficult for people to live a safer and more secure life in the long term.*

- This was the most resonant use case for participants, as it focuses on identifying the causes of repeat homelessness and how services can support people to transition out of this cycle. This is felt to be a really salient issue for this audience, many of whom have personal experience with repeat homelessness.
  - Participants feel it is particularly important that this information is linked at a national, rather than solely local, level, as those experiencing homelessness often move from one area to another and accessing support in a new area can be very difficult without a registered address.

*“Everyone that is or has been in my situation would welcome assistance [with repeat homelessness].”*

- Some participants also point out that this use case connects well with the prior two use cases, as substance use and/or time spent in prison also contributed to their experiences of repeat homelessness. Participants look to see BOLD acknowledging that learning will be drawn across use cases where appropriate.

*“Repeat homelessness in my case was due to being addicted to drugs. I had to buy drugs at all costs. Everyone who I knew that was homeless had drug or alcohol issues. People who work with homeless people need to*

*treat them with compassion. It's not a choice that we want to take drugs, it's because we can't deal with the issues in our lives."*

- As with the previous use cases, some participants feel the causes of repeat homelessness should already be apparent to public services. Negative previous experiences accessing social and/or affordable housing reinforce this perception for participants, with some feeling as though the issue is too big to every be resolved.

*"You don't need an algorithm to sort this out - lack of affordable housing, landlords evicting, social housing in meltdown, domestic violence."*

USE CASE 3: Repeat homelessness		
	Worked well	Areas for improvement
<b>Relevant</b>	Participants all have either experienced repeat homelessness themselves or know someone who has and are <b>able to relate their personal situations to this use case.</b>	Even if not relevant for them personally, participants all know someone in this situation and feel it is a relevant issue for their peer group.
<b>Impactful</b>	Participants feel that understanding how support services could be improved to <b>help people transition out of homelessness</b> would be very impactful.	Participants feel this could be made even more impactful by <b>taking into account the findings from the previous two use cases</b> and seeking to understand how substance use and leaving prison may also contribute to repeat homelessness.
<b>Clear and informative</b>	The questions asked and the outcomes of this use case feel clear to participants.	Some do not feel this use case is informative, as they feel they already know why repeat homelessness occurs and are looking for BOLD to <b>acknowledge the assumptions that already exist.</b>
<b>Non-stigmatising</b>	Participants feel repeat homelessness is a <b>common and salient issue for this audience</b> and welcome BOLD's focus on helping people transition out of this cycle.	Participants do not feel this use case is stigmatising.

Participants also mention the following areas as those they feel BOLD should look into:

- **Provision of mental health support for people experiencing homelessness.** Participants discuss the impact of homelessness on their mental health and the difficulties in accessing mental health support while homeless or transitioning out of being homeless. This audience would be interested to understand the link between provision of mental health support and better outcomes in transitioning out of homelessness.

*“My mental health was horrendous [when I was homeless]. I tried to kill myself four times! And the mental health professionals wouldn’t see me because I was taking drugs.”*

- **Support with financial difficulties and transitioning out of homelessness.** Some participants reflect on their challenges dealing with finances when in and out of homelessness. They suggest an additional area for BOLD to explore is the link between provision of support dealing with debt, gambling addictions and other financial challenges and homelessness.

*“[BOLD should look into] financial issues and gambling issues. If there was data linking on that, it would be useful. I’ve seen this afflict many [experiencing homelessness] before and there is little or no support.”*

#### **Audience detail: Intermediary organisations supporting people experiencing homelessness**

Intermediary organisations fed back on the use cases prior to them being shown to participants. As a result of their feedback, a use case exploring the link between homelessness and committing offences was removed, due to the potential for this to be stigmatising and not having a clear benefit to the target audience. This was replaced with use case 2, exploring the links between time spent in prison and homelessness.

The use cases on the links between rough sleeping and substance use and on repeat homelessness were broadly received positively and as uncontroversial. Stakeholders flagged that wherever possible, use cases should centre on the benefit to the audience.

## **Considerations for the Homelessness audience**

1. **Offer clarity on how BOLD will ensure the anonymity of the data being linked, as this goes a long way to reassure concerns.** Participants have strong initial concerns about consent, which are often assuaged by receiving clarity on anonymity, as assurances that BOLD will not be used for the purposes of ongoing surveillance.
2. **Emphasise the role that BOLD will be playing in evidencing patterns across intersecting experiences.** Participants have plenty of anecdotal evidence of this, such as the prevalence of homelessness amongst prison leavers. Reiterating that BOLD will be seeking to evidence this anecdotal evidence will prevent the programme from being perceived as ‘naïve’ or not worthwhile.

3. **While use cases should investigate intersecting experiences, they should clarify that this information will not be used 'against' people.** Participants are particularly sensitive about their personal information being used to prevent them from accessing services, such as housing, and seek reassurances that BOLD will not detrimentally impact individuals in this way.
4. **Example use cases should lead with the role that BOLD hopes to play in ultimately helping people to transition out of homelessness.** This is the most compelling benefit of BOLD, and participants are particularly engaged with the ways in which BOLD will seek to address the 'root causes' of homelessness.

## Appendix

### Stimulus material showed to participants

Private & Confidential

#### What is data linking?

Data linking is the process of joining different sets of information together so that we can make as much use as possible of the information that each of them holds.

Data linking may include many different types of information and does not necessarily include personally identifiable information.

Linking different sets of data, rather than treating them individually, means that we can draw insights from across the data.

Often, linked data helps us to find new patterns and insights that we would not see if we only considered the sets of data in isolation.

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#### Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD)

A **public service** is a service **provided by the government** that aims to **address the needs** of the public. They aim to **benefit all people in society**, and include things like health and social care, public transport and waste collection.

**Public services** are responsible for supporting people. However, people often need to **access multiple public services for support** across different needs, such as housing, employment and health.

Currently, data is often not shared between all the relevant support services, even when the individual is the same. The Government has created the **BOLD project** to see how **linking data** across services can improve them.

This will give services a much broader **understanding of someone's journey** so that they can better assess the **full range of someone's needs**, rather than looking at each need separately. Ultimately, this will enable services to make **better informed decisions** about which support they should provide.

**BOLD is initially looking at how linking data can help reduce homelessness, reduce substance use issues, support victims of crime and reduce reoffending.**

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## Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD)

### WILL do

- ✓ Share data through a secure internet-based data sharing platform
- ✓ Follow stringent legal processes to gain approval from participating organisations for data to be shared
- ✓ Keep personally identifiable information separate across pieces of data to ensure confidentiality e.g. one person working with a set of data might know your name and nothing else about you, whereas another person working a linked data set might know some information about you, but not your name.
- ✓ Only use data for the purposes of research

### WON'T do

- Collect new data about individuals
- Use your data to make decisions about you or your case
- Share your personal information with anyone outside of government or the criminal justice system
- Use any kind of predictive technology to make decisions about support services for an individual person
- Use your data for any purpose that falls outside of those that have been expressly authorised through data sharing agreements (i.e. the purpose is limited)

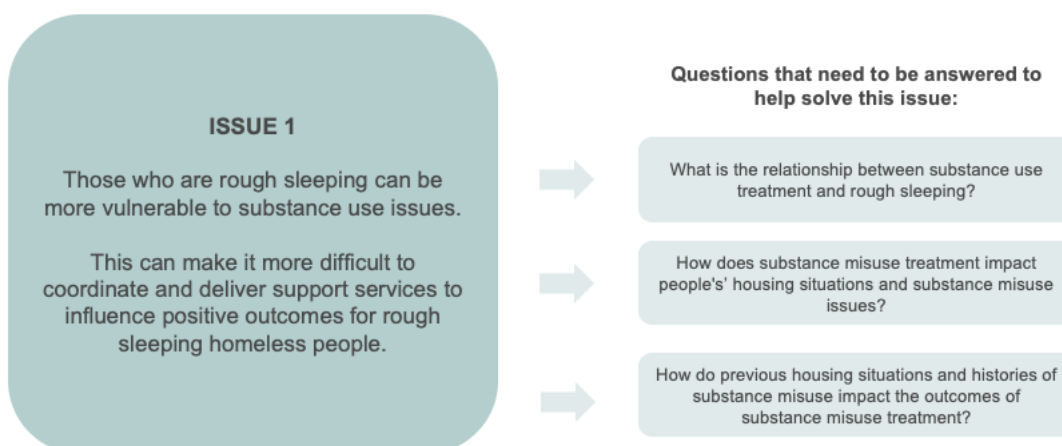
## What BOLD could mean for Homeless people

### Reducing Homelessness

*We know that those who are homeless or sleeping rough often have a variety of support needs and often have to interact with many different public services. The BOLD project aims to better understand why some people repeatedly become homeless, which services are most effective in preventing people, for example prison leavers, from becoming homeless, and what role drug treatment services can play in preventing homelessness.*

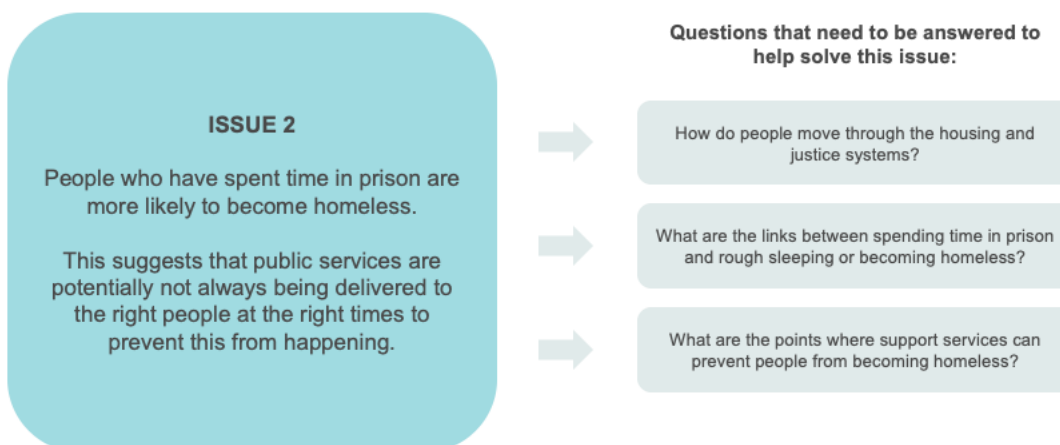


*Issue 1: Rough sleeping and substance use issues*



**Data from the following organisations will be linked:**

	Basic demographic information (e.g. name, age, location)	History of rough sleeping and housing	History of substance use issues	Health history
Local authorities / Department for Housing	✓	✓	✓	
Department for Health	✓	✓	✓	✓



Data from the following organisations will be linked:

	Demographic information (e.g. name, age, location)	History of housing (e.g. housing applications)	History of offending (e.g. nature of offence, length of sentencing)
Local authorities / Department for Housing	✓	✓	✓
Ministry of Justice	✓	✓	✓

**ISSUE 3**

Those who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, can often struggle to transition out of their situation.

Repeat homelessness is an issue that makes it difficult for people to live a safer and more secure life in the long-term.

**Questions that need to be answered to help solve this issue:**

How often does repeat homelessness occur?

What are the circumstances that lead to repeat homelessness?

How can support services for homeless people be improved to help people transition out of homelessness?

**Data from the following organisations will be linked:**

	Demographic information (e.g. name, age, location)	Circumstantial information about homeless people (e.g. family situation, types of risk or needs, history of support and housing)	Information about people at a national level (e.g. all locations lived in, local authorities interacted with)
<b>Local authorities / Department for Housing</b>	✓	✓	