LGBT+ Experiences of Homelessness in Fife

Commissioned by Frontline Fife Homelessness Services

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November 2020
Early Release Copy

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Acknowledgements

Glossary[1]

Cisgender A person whose sense of personal identity corresponds to the sex and gender assigned to him or her at birth.

Gender Refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.

Homelessness FEANTSA defines homelessness conceptually as not a static phenomenon or characteristic of particular individuals or groups, but as a social process which can be reoccurring or long term in nature leading to: rooflessness, houselessness, insecure housing or inadequate housing (FEANTSA, 2005).

Homophobia Negative attitudes towards homosexual people and homosexuality which may manifest in discrimination, hostile behaviour or hate crimes.

LGBT+ An abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and intersex. The + denotes other sexual orientation and gender categories.

Non-binary An umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside of the gender binary of male or female

Sexual Identity Is one part of the umbrella concept of "sexual orientation". Sexual identity does not necessarily reflect sexual attraction or sexual behaviour.

Sexual Orientation Encompasses three dimensions: sexual identity, attraction and behaviour.

Transgender A person whose gender identity differs from the sex recorded for them at birth.

Transitioning The time period where some trans people begin to outwardly live according to their gender identity

Trans man A person recorded as female at birth but identifies as male

Trans woman A person recorded as male at birth but identifies as a female

Transphobia The fear, dislike or prejudice against transgender people.

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[1] Many of the above definitions have been taken from Quilty and Norris (2020).

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Executive Summary

About the Study

To ensure the unique needs of LGBT+ people living in Fife - many in rural and small communities - are better served, in 2019 Frontline Fife commissioned a small qualitative study to identify some of the existing and emerging challenges experienced and encountered by those in the LGBT+ community who have had direct experience of homelessness or been at risk of homelessness. The aim is to assist in the identification of more inclusive practices to enable LGBT+ people in Fife to access the housing and support they need.

The research is based on interviews with 14 LGBT+ people who have experienced homelessness or have been at risk of homelessness plus discussions with 11 Fife based professionals who influence policy or service design and delivery of support and housing for LGBT+ people. Additionally and importantly, 61 workers from Fife's Public Social Partnership for Short term Housing Support and Homelessness Services (PSP) took part in an online survey.

Major Findings

The needs of LGBT+ people living in Fife, in common with LGBT+ people elsewhere in Scotland and the UK, are being conspicuously overlooked or misrepresented within the housing sector leading to the direct experience of homelessness for some and exposing many others to the risk of homelessness.

In Fife there is a willingness by all parties, from frontline workers through mangers and policy makers, to drive forward change and make improvements across public and voluntary services, ensuring the lived experience of those within the local LGBT+ population are centre stage when shaping service delivery and policy making.

There is a dearth of systematic data collection within housing and other services relating to gender and sexual identity and therefore, the scale and needs of LGBT+ people are currently overlooked and/or misunderstood.

Living in rural or small villages can have an additional negative impact on LGBT+ people compared to those living in urban areas/cities. Lack of convenient access to specialist services, social groups and safe places for socialising as well as the predominance of heteronormative views were identified as contributing to isolation, stigma and exclusion.

Recommendations

As a priority, establish opportunities for policy makers, service providers and those with lived experience of homelessness to come together, within safe spaces, to start a dialogue on how best to bring about inclusive services which take account of the needs of LGBT+ people. This dialogue should focus particularly on those experiencing multiple disadvantage and include

those living in isolated locations distant from LGBT+ support and advice agencies.

Formal training should be made available to empower workers and LGBT+ people to develop meaningful client/worker relationships on an equal footing.

Review current homelessness housing and homelessness data collection to include the opportunity for clients to be identified by gender /sexual identity and, linked with this, expand the assessment of housing options to meet the specific needs of LGBT+ people.

Review the assessment of 'intentionality'. It is clear from this and other research that there is considerable uncertainty and concern at present regarding the classification of LGBT+ people who have been rejected by parents or partners as 'intentionally homeless'.

Address the policy and service delivery gap in terms of early intervention and prevention in relation to LGBT+ identity by expanding and developing LGBT+ education in schools. Our LGBT+ interviewees, of all ages, spoke about the confusion and apprehension experienced in 'coming out', and the lack of understanding in wider society. Those working across different support services (including but going beyond housing and homelessness) need to take cognisance of this issue as fundamental to the mitigation of risk and the safeguarding of a potentially vulnerable LGBT+ population. Preventive education, policy and practice will help people to understand who they are and who they want to be while promoting zero tolerance to combat stigma and abuse.

1. Introduction

Scottish Government statistics show that in 2019/20, 31,333 households were assessed as being homeless. Of this number, approximately seven percent (2,104) were registered in Fife; by population. Fife is Scotland's third largest council area (Scottish Government, 2020: Table 10a/b, 2019-20). It is recognised that many more experience homelessness than are formally recorded, with 'hidden homelessness' a concern in Fife as elsewhere.

As part of a programme for eradicating homelessness across Scotland, in 2018 the Scottish government identified 70 recommendations for action in a high-level action plan: *Ending Homelessness Together.* Following this directive, all local authorities were tasked with putting in place locally sensitive *Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans*. These plans emphasise the need for *fair access for all* to stable, secure housing and place high importance on providing services that are person-centred and founded on rights and lived experience. While many groups at risk of homelessness were identified in these plans, LGBT+ communities regrettably received scant attention.

While only five per cent of people in the UK identify as LGBT+ it is estimated that they make up a quarter of all homelessness (Fraser et al, ,2019). Inequality and homophobia continue to exist in the UK, with LGBT+ hate crime increasing by 24% between 2019 and 2020. Despite this, research on the place of LGBT+ people in UK society and particularly on their related problems of homelessness has been limited; the portrayal of LGBT+ as affluent and well-housed has endured.

To ensure the unique needs of LGBT+ people living in Fife - many in rural and small communities - are better served, in 2019 Frontline Fife commissioned this small qualitative study to identify some of the existing and emerging challenges experienced and encountered by those in the LGBT+ community who have had direct experience of homelessness or been at risk of homelessness. The aim is to assist in the identification of more inclusive practices and in doing so, enable LGBT+ people in Fife to better access the housing and support they need.

N.B. Since commissioning this research, the Scottish government has reviewed its recommendations in light of the impact of Covid-19. Within this review, the rights of LGBT+ and other marginalised groups are specifically recognised (Scottish Government, 2020).

2. Overview of Present Knowledge

LGBT+ rights have been slow to develop in the UK and the fight for equality continues. Homosexuality was decriminalised in the UK in 1980 and same-sex civil marriages made lawful in 2014. The last piece of legislation that explicitly criminalised sex between two men was removed from the statute books in 2013 in Scotland (Matthews, 2020; see also Scottish Government, n.d.) Yet, there has been little recognition in the UK of LGBT+ as a vulnerable population especially in relation to accessing housing. There is no systematic data recording by homelessness services about sexual or gender identity. Research carried out by LGBT Youth Scotland (2016) on Housing and Homelessness found that there are only three Local Authorities in Scotland that have seriously considered doing this.

The findings from a review of published literature and policy reviews show that while there is a growing recognition that LGBT+ people are overrepresented among homeless people, there is a lack of knowledge about why this is so.

Key Findings

- Legal rights for LGBT+ people have been slow to develop; inequality and homophobia are still rife throughout the UK. LGBT+ related hate crimes increased by 24% (to 1,486) in Scotland in 2019-20 when compared to the previous year. After race-based hate crime, it is the second most commonly reported hate crime in Scotland (Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, 2020).

- In the UK, 5.4% of the population identify as being 'other' than heterosexual (Office for National Statistics, 2020). It is estimated that 25% of those who are homeless are LGBT+ (Nolan, 2017).

- In contrast to the clichéd portrayal of the LGBT+ community as white, affluent and gentrified, the majority are far from well off with many living in poverty (Matthews et al. 2019; Hollibaugh and Weiss, 2015, Uhrig, 2014). They also experience higher rates of substance misuse, self-harm, suicide, poor mental health (Bachmann and Gooch, 2018) and isolation (Teuton, 2018) than the general population. Healthcare and service provision for LGBT+ people in the UK is inadequate and in some cases hostile (Government Equalities Office, 2018).

- According to the Albert Kennedy Trust (2015), 77% of LGBT+ young people in England who have become homeless report that the main causal factor is 'coming out' to parents. As yet, there appear to be no comparable figures for Scotland.

- In 2018 the UK Government Equalities Office launched an *LGBT Action Plan* (2018b; see also Lawrence and Taylor, 2019), committing the UK government to address, among many other issues, the causes of LGBT homelessness. However, because of devolved responsibilities much of

the plan is only applicable to England. While at the present time in Scotland, there appears to be no plan of equivalent scope, the Scottish Government's *Ending Homelessness Together High Level Action Plan* (2018) recognises 'sex, gender reassignment, and sexual orientation' as 'protected' groups (together with age, disability, race and religion or belief); the Scottish Rough Sleeping Action Group's *Ending Homeless* (HARSAG, 2018) acknowledges a similar priority. Fife's *Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan 2019-24* (Kingdom HA, 2018) does not explicitly mention LGBT+. However, the Scottish Government and Scottish Human Rights Commission are currently developing a National Action Plan on Human Rights, which takes account of the need to be aware of LGBT+ needs and their vulnerability to homelessness (Scottish Human Rights Commission, 2020).

- The *Hard Edges Report Scotland* (Bramley et al. 2019) highlights that among the reasons for homelessness are multiple severe harms, such as poverty, childhood trauma, violence, mental health issues and substance misuse. The report also records that services are difficult to access and there is a lack of specialist support in rural areas. There is, however, no explicit reference made to the impact of being LGBT+ or other person specific issues such as disability, which affect identity. However, the wider evidence indicates that being LGBT+ can make people more vulnerable to the factors that underpin homelessness which, when coupled with homophobic prejudice and stigma, means facing layers of disadvantage that much of the wider population do not experience (see also Fraser et al, 2019).

- The 2016 *Fife LGBT Community Needs Assessment Report* (Greenwood and Olsson, 2016) showed that LGBT+ people are significantly disadvantaged when using health and support services, which rarely recognise or take account of their specific needs. The report further concludes that LGBT+ people are unable to live openly and do not feel sufficiently comfortable or safe 'to be themselves'. It highlights the absence of LGBT+ specific social activities and venues in much of Fife, which severely limits the opportunity to connect with peers, contributing to isolation and negatively impacting on health and wellbeing.

- In Fife, two out of three people live in an urban area, one in six in a small town, and the remainder (1 in 6) in rural areas/small village (Fife Centre for Equalities and Fife Council Research Team, 2019). Coverage of the rural dimension differentiates the above cited Fife enquiry from most other investigations of LGBT+ people which have tended to be urban centric and relatively negligent about LGBT+ living in poverty (Matthews and Poyner, 2017). More recently, a study of LGBT+ young people and homelessness in Ireland, found that those from rural, and some ethnic groups and religious backgrounds, are at particularly high risk of homelessness when they come out or are in transition (Quilty and Norris, 2020).

- LGBT+ people are more likely than the general population to be living on their own, and therefore more vulnerable to homelessness; two thirds of homeless people are single (Scottish Government, 2020).

- Recent research on young LGBT+ people who have experience of homelessness reveals the complexity of the interaction between their sexual and gender identity and their housing situation. The findings suggest that in the context of the provision of tailored support, pathways out of homelessness are closely associated with young people accepting and becoming more comfortable with their LGBT+ identity (Matthews et al. 2019).

- At present, in common with most of Scotland, there is no systematic data collected on sexual identity by housing services in Fife, and many LGBT+ clients are therefore 'invisible' to policy makers responsible for service delivery (Tinker et al. 2014). These gaps highlight the persistence of heteronormativity in administrative processes, which results in direct and indirect LGBT+ discrimination (Matthews, 2020).

3. Field Research: challenges and limitations

The research for this report is based on interviews and discussions with three different groups. Firstly, and most importantly, 14 LGBT+ people who have experienced 'homelessness' or have been 'at risk of homelessness' were interviewed (For a definition of these terms see Citizens Advice Scotland, 2019). Secondly, 61 workers recruited from across Fife's Public Social Partnership for Short term Housing Support and Homelessness Services (PSP) took part in an online survey; seven of these workers were subsequently interviewed to elicit greater insights and a further five staff from Frontline Fife took part in a focus group. Thirdly, 11 professionals who influence policy or service design and delivery of support and housing for LGBT+ people were interviewed.

The recruitment of participants in the field research was facilitated by advertising the project through support and housing organisations across Fife. Additionally, face to face meetings took place with three Fife based LGBT+ support groups. Contact was also made with two other Scottish local authorities with substantial rural populations.

The main challenge of the research was to enrol LGBT+ participants who were willing to be interviewed. This reflects a widely recognised reluctance on the part of the LGBT+ community with experience of homelessness to talk about their personal circumstances. While the number of people participating in the working group were smaller than anticipated, recruitment of support workers and policy makers for the online survey and one to one interviews were facilitated by the above-mentioned organisations.

Fieldwork took place between August 2019 and April 2020.

3.1 Findings from LGBT+ Interviews

Key Findings
Experience of Homelessness and Risk of Homelessness
Of the 14 interviewees, only one did not think being LGBT+ was a factor in becoming or being at risk of homelessness. Rejection by family or ex-partners for 'coming out' was the most common trigger and something unique to LGBT+ people across all age groups. The complex interaction of a backdrop of poverty, struggle with identity, homophobia and poor mental health emerged as significant.

Engagement with Support Services
A lack of awareness about support services and to a lesser extent concerns about prejudices and safety of temporary accommodation directly linked to being LGBT+ held people back from accessing support. Four had experience of 'hidden homelessness', dealing with the situation themselves and putting themselves potentially at greater risk of harm, for example by sofa surfing. The six who had support from homelessness services were positive about their interactions but felt staff could be more LGBT+ aware and confident to ask about sexual identity 'up front'; they also strongly supported the updating of data recording systems to include sexual and gender identity.

Current Housing Circumstances
The interviewees were split in two in relation to their current housing, five were 'uncertain', living either in temporary accommodation, sofa surfing or at risk of homelessness, and the other nine in 'stable' tenancies. Five had been supported into their own tenancies through Fife Council and for four interviewees this was transformational, as they could now live the life they always wanted. Housing is vital to stability. Feeling truly 'at home' is about being comfortable with individual identity, which is strongly linked to having access to local LGBT+ groups.

This section begins with a profile of the interviewees followed by a four part analysis of their responses: i) experiences of homelessness and risk of homelessness, ii) engagement with support services, iii) views on support services and iv) interviewees' current housing circumstances.

The interviewees

The research was advertised through support and homelessness organisations across Fife. Through a mixture of purposive and convenience sampling, 14 LGBT+ participants were recruited for interview. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix 1). Notes were made during the interviews and sent to interviewees for verification or additional comments before being included in the analysis. A thematic analysis of responses was carried out (Cousin, 2009; Holloway and Jefferson, 2000; Nowell et al. 2017).

While a small sample, the extraordinary individual stories of these 14 participants (see for example boxed *Case Studies* below) not only illustrate

themes commonly reported in the literature but, importantly, also raise issues that are relatively neglected and 'new' to the published research.

A profile of individual interviewees, in alphabetic name order, is provided in Table 1. The names of interviewees were assigned to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1: Profile of interviewees

TA = temporary accommodation   LA = living outside Fife

ID	LGBT+ Identity	Age	Based	Housing Situation at time of Interview	Engagement with Housing Services and overall views
Brian	Trans man	16-24	Small Town	Back with parents, 'evicted' after coming out and sofa surfed	No, was unaware of support
Cheryl	Trans woman	50-59	Large Town	Own tenancy, relationship ended when came out.	Yes, through other service, positive, but chose not to stay in TA.
Dan	Trans man	16-24	Small village, LA	Own tenancy, 'evicted' by parents after coming out	Yes, through other service. TA - Negative reactions
Fiona	Cisgender Gay Woman	25-29	Small village, LA	Still in TA after split with partner	Yes, positive experience.
Finn	Trans man	16-24	Small village	Own tenancy, 'evicted' after 'came out' by parents	Yes, through other service. Positive, unaware of TA.
Gerry	Cisgender Gay man	40-49	Small village	Own tenancy after split from partner	Yes, positive but chose not to stay in TA.
Iain	Cisgender Gay man	16-24	Rural area	With parents and recently 'came out', had been concerned of risk.	No experience of services and unaware
Janet	Trans woman	50-59	Small village	Own tenancy, homeless as used finances to transition.	Yes, and positive
Layla	Trans woman	30-39	Large Town	At risk, as lost long-term job due to transphobia.	No contact and unaware of support.
Maura	Cisgender Bi-'Woman	16-24	Small village	With parents and not 'out' because of risk	No experience and unaware
Neil	Cisgender Bi-sexual Man	40-49	Large Town	Sofa surfing, 'evicted' after coming out to long-term partner.	Aware but unengaged as views TA as 'unsafe'
Susan	Trans woman	40-49	Small village	With partner but at risk for coming out.	Aware but no contact with housing services
Tim	Cisgender Gay man	40-49	Small village	Own tenancy. Had split up with partner and moved back in with parents.	Aware but unengaged as views TA as 'unsafe'
Viv	Cisgender Gay Woman	25-29	Small Town	Own tenancy, did not come out to parents when younger	No experience but aware.

Summary of Table 1

N.B. Not all participants disclosed *both* their gender and sexual identities

LGBT+ identity: Seven participants identified as cisgender - two as gay women, three as gay men. One woman and one man identified as bisexual. Seven interviewees identified as trans – four as trans women and three as trans men.

Age: Five respondents were under 25, and five were aged 40 or over; of the latter two were 50 or over.

Residence: Four interviewees lived in a large or small town; 10 lived in a small village and one in a rural area.

Housing Situation: At the time of interview seven interviewees had their own tenancies.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Maura

Maura is 17 and confused about her sexual identity, describing herself as bi-sexual, but also wonders if she is asexual, as she explains she isn't sure she is really interested in sex at all. Maura is doing well at school and because of the 'safe space' created there she feels she has the freedom to use this as time to reflect on who she really is. She also has close friends who are 'LGBT+' that she finds reassuring. Maura has not told any of her family about how she feels about her sexual identity because she is worried about how they might react and put her at risk of being homeless. She also doesn't think that this should be any of their business. Maura's feelings about how her family might react are justified. Her sister 'came out' as a lesbian when she moved out last year and her father now no longer speaks to her, creating a divide in the family. She is close to her grandmother who is sick and is adamant that she is not to know about her struggle with her identity. She said "I think that would be really hard for her to accept. She doesn't see me that way." Maura feels like she is not telling the truth to her family and worries they will find out from others, but she also doesn't want to risk losing them and wishes things could be different.

Case Study 2: Brian

Brian was born a female but struggled with his gender identity. At 17 years old he revealed to his parents how he felt. They could not accept what he said and told him he had to leave. Unaware of services that could offer support and not even accessing benefits, Brian turned to friends for help. Over the next six months he moved from one friend's sofa to the next, or stayed with friends of friends, always feeling like he was putting others out, having no space of his own and sometimes not feeling safe. His father met with him every few weeks to give him some money. Brian was depressed and desperate. He struggled one night to find somewhere to sleep, and finally when he did a fight broke out and he had to flee. Having exhausted all options with friends or those he knew, he turned up at his parent's and begged them to let him stay, and they agreed. Over the next six months Brian self-isolated in his bedroom, only leaving to use the bathroom, and barely eating. He felt low and lonely. His mother and father were concerned about his mental health and called the local GP to set up an appointment. Brian recalls how his mother knocked on his bedroom door and said it was time he got the help he needed. At the first appointment the GP spoke about the process of transitioning and Brian felt like it was the first time he was really starting to live. He is currently in the process and feels that the only barrier now to him having the life he wants is his own self-acceptance.

Case Study 3: Neil

Neil had lived with his girlfriend for eight years and they had two children together and were 'settled'. Neil was a self-employed decorator and earned 'good money' as he worked hard and was a committed father. On the surface all seemed well, but Neil had always struggled with his sexual identity and knew he was bi-sexual. He decided to tell his partner as it was affecting his mental health, and he didn't want to have any secrets from her. She did not react well and told him to leave. She also took the children and moved to a different part of Scotland and at the time of interview he was not being allowed to see them. His father also turned his back on him. He stayed initially with a friend sofa surfing. Within the next few months he was back working and met a man, they became close and Neil moved in with him. However, the relationship became abusive and Neil did not know who to turn to. The mental and physical abuse escalated over that year and Neil eventually called the police. They encouraged Neil to press charges and he agreed. He moved out of the flat and at the time of interview was sofa surfing with another friend. He explained that his mental health had really deteriorated and he had been suicidal. He had been diagnosed as having a bi-polar disorder and was struggling to accept this. Although worried about having to share facilities and concerned about falling into substance misuse through the people he might meet in homelessness services, Neil recognised that he needed help, and was in the process of making contact with the Council.

i) Experience of Homelessness and Risk of Homelessness

Struggle with sexual / gender Identity and experiences of homophobia

The vulnerability of LGBT+ homelessness is closely aligned to the discomfort of being queer in a heteronormative society (Matthews and Poyner, 2017). All interviewees described being aware of being 'different' and in a minority. Trans people reported feeling particularly vulnerable to stigma and were noticeably lacking in self-acceptance and confidence. Several trans respondents identified the stalling of consultations over the 2004 Gender Recognition Act as symptomatic of the barriers they faced in achieving an accepted place in society. All interviewees described struggling with their identity and viewed revealing who they are to others, particularly in the initial stages of 'coming out', as a 'gamble' - for fear of exclusion.

The detailed picture of individual experiences reveals a complexity of detail not always apparent in summary analyses. For example, Viv and Tim only came out to their parents when they were older and had their own tenancies. Iain only revealed his sexual identity to his parents when he was concerned it was otherwise going to be disclosed through Facebook. Maura, (Case Study 1) at the time of interview had still not told her parents about her sexual orientation because she was concerned how they might react.

Mental health, abuse and violence

Four interviewees who grew up in and continued to live in a small village or rural area reported not 'coming out' until they were much older and felt that throughout that time they 'hid from themselves' which had an adverse impact on their mental health. Gerry felt his lack of self-acceptance was clearly a contributory factor to his mental health issues and played a role in his marriage breakup, leading to homelessness. Brian and Gerry had both been physically attacked because of their sexual identity and Brian reported suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result (see *Case Study 2*). Finn and Dan faced transphobic abuse from their families for years. Not knowing where to get help, they felt trapped, leading to the deterioration in their mental health. They were hospitalised many times. All interviewees reported experiencing stigma and being abused either physically or on-line because of their LGBT+ identity.

Rejection

The fear of personal rejection by family and friends and social rejection by a potentially hostile and homophobic society dominated the narratives of all the interviewees. For many, struggles with self-acceptance of a queer identity was driven, at least in part, by fear of rejection and even when identity was resolved, rejection frequently remained a persistent worry. This was particularly apparent among those interviewees who lived in small villages and rural communities without easy recourse to safe and protected environments.

While past research has tended to focus on young people, this study reveals that rejection as a cause of homelessness can affect all LGBT+ age groups. Fear of rejection manifested in the form of a rebuff, verbal abuse or physical violence is a constant in the lives of LGBT+ people, it is not something that goes away with age or growing confidence in identity.

Among the interviewees, four were put at risk of homelessness and eight became homeless because of rejection by family or partners after coming out. Both Finn and Dan, whilst they were in hospital, were told by their parents they had no home to return to after coming out. Another young trans man, Brian, was told to leave by his parents after disclosure of his gender identity. Cheryl and Janet, both trans women and Neil, a bi-sexual cisgender man, all became homeless when their marriages ended after coming out.

However, as with other aspects of this report the detail of individual life experiences often revealed complex and contrasting stories. For example, Gerry and Tim became homeless when their respective gay marriages broke down. Tim, who had been at risk of homelessness when he was younger as a result of his sexual identity, was clear that the breakup of his relationship with his gay partner which resulted in homelessness had nothing to do with being LGBT+. Fiona lost her home when her partner had a mental breakdown and, like Tim, did not think that sexual identity had been a factor.

Isolation and rurality

Echoing findings from the *Fife Needs Impact Assessment in Fife* (Greenwood and Olsson, 2016), the 10 rural/small village based interviewees (Table 1) in our sample reported feeling an acute lack of acceptance, no sense of community, and having to strictly regulate their behaviour. Among these, four trans people recorded that local residents were resistant to recognising anything but their birth assigned identity, making them feel both estranged from and rejected by the wider community. While LGBT+ individuals living in larger settlements frequently have access to known, visible, safe and inclusive or dedicated spaces for LGBT+ people for most living in rural communities such access is not the norm. For rural based LGBT+ individuals the ability to seek out informal support is therefore limited, other than online, compounding further their isolation and disconnection.

Safety and security

All interviewees reported constantly regulating their behaviour because of a general fear of how others may react to their LGBT+ identity and feeling 'unsafe' to be themselves. The perception and experience of the prejudice of others towards them as LGBT+ and the risk of abuse was a particular barrier to seeking help.

Six of the interviewees who had their own tenancies, however, acknowledged that here they felt safe and secure and that this had had a positive impact on their mental health. By contrast, Neil who was sofa surfing and Layla who was at risk of losing her home for financial reasons did not feel at all secure. Maura felt that by not telling her parents "the truth" about her sexual identity

she was "living a lie" and worried they would find out from someone else and ask her to leave. Susan feared her partner, who was finding it difficult to cope with her 'new' gender identity, might ask her to move out. All described the pressure they felt and had underlying concerns about how their situations were affecting their mental health. Safeguarding those in temporary accommodation is a fundamental aspect of homelessness support services. Promoting commitment to reducing the risk of abuse and guaranteeing security is critical when delivering housing services.

Complexity

The 14 in-depth interviews conducted for this research bring to the fore the complexity of the interaction between sexual / gender identity and housing (Matthews et al. 2019). As our survey results suggest, LGBT+ homelessness is not just a youth problem: five of our sample were under 25 years, and five over 40, two of whom were 50 or over. Homelessness or the risk of homelessness is not just about parental rejection. Rejection by ex-partners for 'coming out' was the reason for homelessness or risk of homelessness for 4 interviewees (Fiona, Gerry, Neil and Tim). The varied background stories of the interviewees further highlight how LGBT+ people are not a homogeneous group, presenting a challenge to the designation of LGBT+ as a 'community', with trans people in particular feeling on the margins.

Maura's story (*Case Study 1*) highlights further levels of complexity (see also Brian and Neil's *Case Studies 2 and 3* respectively). At 17 years old Maura admits to being confused about her sexuality. Having identified as bi-sexual for several years, at the time of interview, she thought she might be asexual. As Matthews (2020) shows being conflicted over queer identity is not helped by the many categories that now make up the '+' part of the 'LGBT+' acronym - which itself is a heteronormative derived classification. Without access to support mechanisms (informal or formal), the impact of not having the opportunity to explore identity over time will amplify negative feelings of insecurity and lack of confidence – security and confidence being key personal characteristics for thriving and resilience when dealing with social challenges.

Backdrop of Poverty

Poverty, as identified in the *Hard Edges Report Scotland*, is the backdrop to homelessness (Bramley et al. 2019). The *Hard Edges* report demonstrates that throughout Scotland there is a strong and direct correlation between homelessness and poverty. Yet, in common with findings in previous LGBT+ studies, most of the participants in our research only hinted at living with deprivation (Walker, 2014). Only one person was open about their struggle to survive and how living rurally made this even more challenging.

> *"Living rurally, travel as well is expensive, so it can mean you having to decide if you are going to eat or go somewhere." (Dan, Trans man from the Borders)*

LGBT+ identity, however, was shown to have a direct relationship with poverty for two people. Janet had invested all her money to travel abroad and pay for her transition, as this was not available on the NHS at the time; she was, as a consequence, effectively homeless upon return. Layla lost her job because of her ex-employer's transphobia and was at risk of homelessness as a result.

Resilience and hope

As well as challenges, the life stories of our interviewees demonstrate the incredible resilience of some individuals, albeit born out of necessity. All interviewees felt hopeful that societal progress with increasing acceptance of non-binary sexual identities would continue and that inclusion would be promoted. It was strongly felt by all respondents that young people are less closed-minded than older generations, being more questioning of heteronormativity and accepting of difference. Overall, despite reservations about support services (see below) interviewees were very positive about Fife "being an accepting place". All felt that the teaching of LGBT+ rights in schools and the creation of safe spaces, such as is in Kirkcaldy High School, were significant indicators of the progress made.

ii) Engagement with Support Services

The responses of the LGBT+ interviewees identified three categories in relation to engagement with services:

Those unaware of support services

Unaware of the existence of support services, four interviewees - Iain, Maura, Tim and Viv - did not come out to their families for fear of rejection and becoming homeless. Brian having come out was rejected by his family and sofa surfed with friends for six months before eventually begging his parents to let him live in the family home (*Case Study 2*). Tim, who experienced homelessness when his gay marriage failed and being unaware of support services moved back in with his homophobic parents and effectively "started again". Layla at the time of interview was struggling financially with her mortgage and at risk of homelessness, she was unaware of how or where to get support.

Aware of services, but wary

Neil and Susan were aware of how to access housing support but chose to deal with their situations themselves. Susan moved into a property she owns that had been declared unfit to live in. With no electricity, she stayed for a few months until she was eventually allowed back home by her partner. Both Susan and Neil, though aware of housing support services, had very negative perceptions of the type and quality of housing provided for homeless people; this was their main reason for not accessing help.

> *"I don't want to stay in temporary or hostel accommodation. I know the reputations of those places. I am not scum. I know me, with my drinking, if I fall in with those people, I will fall down with them"* (Neil, Bi-sexual cisgender man).

Neil also recognised that despite his reservations he needed to get help from the Council and was planning on getting in touch with them (See *Case Study 3*).

Aware of services and engaged

Cheryl, Dan and Finn experienced abuse at 'home' because of their sexuality, and only became connected to housing support when accessing other services for mental health and financial support. Fiona, Janet and Gerry referred themselves directly to housing support when they became homeless.

The variable levels of engagement of interviewees with housing support services highlights the need for their positive promotion as both inclusive and empathetic and as demonstrating understanding of the diversity of LGBT+ identities. Access to such services at a much earlier point in a crisis cycle can prevent homelessness from occurring.

iii) Views on Housing Support Services

Positive about support

Among the six interviewees who had direct experience of housing support most were very positive about their interactions, from their first point of contact to the last.

> *"I was known as who I wanted to be known as, and they always used the right name."* (Janet, Trans woman)

Dan, not a Fife resident, however had a very poor experience in temporary accommodation.

> *"I wasn't treated right over those 8 months at all. The security called me 'hen' and 'lass' and even with the trans flag in my room. It made me feel uncomfortable and it didn't feel like I was being listened to."* (Dan, Trans man)

All interviewees felt that LGBT+ training would ensure that staff were not only more informed and confident about their interactions but would also help in challenging heteronormative attitudes.

Waiting on tenancies

The length of time waiting for tenancies varied between interviewees from one to eight months.

Finn was 'fast-tracked' into his own tenancy within a month following a stay in hospital because of mental health problems. He lived with his parents during the intervening period, unaware and uninformed of the availability of temporary accommodation.

Finn and Cheryl both reported that it took weeks to get their tenancies ready which, with gaps in payments for community care grants, put them under severe financial pressure.

> *"When I moved into my tenancy there was very little there…I got a sofa from my friend…I put the community care grant in, in November and it won't be actually processed until January. I have had to borrow money and use £1000 of my savings to get the flat liveable." (Cheryl, Trans woman)*

Gerry, who had worked in housing for a local council years beforehand, chose to sofa surf with relatives until his tenancy became available. He knew about the possibility of temporary housing but didn't want to risk having to share facilities with people who may be homophobic, fearing the effect it could have on his mental health. Cheryl, for the same reasons as Gerry, also chose to stay with her ex-partner for three months until a tenancy became available.

Dan and Janet were in temporary accommodation for eight months before getting their tenancies but felt that the standard of accommodation had been good.

With the introduction of *Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans* and the current political aspiration for doing things differently, there is greater scope to redesign housing and support services to address the availability and quality of temporary and permanent accommodation.

Gender and sexual identity and inflexibility of systems

All interviewees felt that asking about gender and sexual identity should be "up front" and it should be the "responsibility" of support agencies to raise the issue and not up to individual applicants. They maintained that it is important that LGBT+ people identity is clarified at the outset to inform plans and ensure they are not erroneously being classified as 'intentionally homeless'.

> *"I think they should just ask the question up front because it would make it easier…. you are wanting to tell someone but then you are also waiting for someone to ask in those situations." (Brian, Trans man)*

Echoing views recorded in other research (England, 2019), all interviewees who engaged with housing support lamented the unpreparedness and inflexibility of applicant procedures and recording systems.

> *"I think they should ask about your sexual identity. It is my main reason for being homeless so it should be noted. When I went to the Council*

the lady said they didn't have a form for me, as if I was really abnormal. She said, "I have never had to deal with this." (Finn, Trans man)

These experiences reflect the dominant heteronormativity of administrative processes, underlining the conclusion of Matthews (2020) that the change needed isn't just about adding 'a box', but cultural and structural.

Abuse and risk of harm

Only one interviewee, located outwith Fife, reported experiencing personal abuse when they lived in temporary accommodation. Yet the perceived risk of abuse and harm was one of the main reasons identified by many interviewees for not engaging with housing support services: this apparent conflict between perception and experience is doubtless a reflection of the small sample of LGBT+ interviewees. Abuse and antisocial behaviour are known to occur within temporary accommodation and while there are measures in place to combat this, explicitly communicating and working under a zero tolerance policy would support a preventative approach rather than just the current consequential one.

iv) Current Housing Circumstances

There were two different groupings in terms of housing situations:

Those still 'uncertain' (at risk of or currently homeless)

This group comprises five interviewees: Fiona, Neil, Layla, Maura and Susan. Fiona at the time of interview was still living in temporary accommodation and Neil was sofa surfing. Layla was at risk of losing her housing for financial reasons, Maura had still not come out to her parents and Susan's relationship with her partner had become strained, putting her at risk of homelessness again.

Those 'settled'

A second group - Iain, Viv, Brian, Tim, Dan, Cheryl, Finn, Janet and Gerry - had come out and were settled in secure accommodation at the time of interview. Iain had just recently come out to his parents even though he feared becoming homeless as a result, but in the event, they were actually very supportive. Viv on the other hand only came out to her parents when she had her own place and was no longer 'at risk' of being evicted from the parental home. While her mother was accepting of her LGBT+ identity from the beginning, it had taken her dad many years to adjust. Brian, who had begged his parents to allow him to move back in after months of sofa surfing, had developed a good relationship with them, and they were supporting him with transitioning. Tim was moving into a shared flat with friends. Dan, Cheryl, Finn, Janet and Gerry all had their own tenancies, secured through support from the Council.

Cheryl, Finn, Janet and Gerry described having their own space as 'transformational' as it meant they could finally live the life they wanted.

> *"This is my own space and I have realised I have never had that before. I am looking forward now to my life. I just need to be less isolated and get out more."* (Cheryl, Trans woman)

What the above shows is that when there is understanding and compassion and when positive and inclusive support is provided for individuals and families, issues can be overcome early thereby lessening the risk of homelessness or, at the very least, reducing homelessness to a one-time brief episode - averting the risk of long term episodic homelessness and the consequent negative impacts on wellbeing.

v) Conclusions

Of the 14 interviewees, only one person did not think being LGBT+ was a factor in them becoming homeless. Rejection by parents and ex-partners for coming out emerges as the most important cause for being at risk of or becoming homeless, a view shared across all age groups. The backdrop of poverty and struggle with identity and homophobia, the impact on mental health, abuse and violence, experiences of isolation and the complexity of LGBT+ identity and interaction with housing services all emerged as significant causal or contributory factors.

Responses to homelessness were dependent on awareness of and engagement with homelessness support services and, to a lesser extent, perceptions of emergency housing as being unsafe. In particular, concerns about potential abuse for being LGBT+, particularly in temporary accommodation, were a barrier to individuals availing of support, leaving them potentially at greater risk of rooflessness/rough sleeping with no direct or immediate access to safe and secure housing.

Those who were unaware of the availability of support or had negative perceptions of support agencies dealt with their situations themselves, either by not coming out - and thus retaining residency in parental or partner homes - or by sofa surfing, thereby, in some cases, putting themselves at risk of harm. Those who engaged positively with services and who were assigned their own tenancies described this as life-changing. Having secure and habitable housing is crucial to social and psychological wellbeing but feeling 'at home' is also about self-acceptance and realising a sense of belonging.

The main frustrations about homelessness services were the heteronormativity and inflexibility of housing and support systems. Many interviewees expressed the hope that with LGBT+ training, support staff would become confident enough to ask questions about sexual identity "up front", and to engage in meaningful conversations with clients – contributing to the emergence of more accommodating interactions and adaptable procedures.

The life courses charted by our 14 interviewees have brought to the fore the level of stigma that continues to exist for LGBT+ people and the risks they run of social isolation: these experiences being particularly marked for LGBT+ individuals living in rural and deprived areas. In this context, as Mathew and Poyner (2017) and more recently Quilty and Norris (2020) have pointed out, access to LGBT+ support groups emerged as being crucial for many to affirm a positive identity. Seven of our interviewees reported attending two of the four LGBT+ groups that currently exist in Fife and acknowledged that it was important to have this space so that they could "be themselves" and meet others "like them".

3.2   Findings from Support Workers

Key Findings
- Workers reported having high levels of engagement but variable levels of confidence in supporting LGB people and particularly, trans people.
- Workers are frustrated with inflexible systems and prejudices that still exist and are manifested by both residents and some staff.

Introduction

This section presents findings from frontline support workers drawn from the organisations that comprise Fife's Public Social Partnership for Short term Housing Support and Homelessness Services (PSP). Sixty-one online surveys were completed (see Appendix II). In addition, seven workers were interviewed to elicit greater insight from the survey findings and five staff specifically from Frontline Fife took part in a focus group.

i) On-line Survey Results

Table 2 sets out the findings based on the survey results. A total of 61 support staff completed the questionnaire. Some questions were not answered by all respondents.

Table 2: Summary results from on-line survey of support staff

	Yes	No	Unaware of issue	Total Responses
LGBT				
Supported someone Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual in the last 5 years	49(80%)	9 (15%)	3 (5%)	61
Confident in supporting LGB	49 (82%)	4 (7%)	7 (11%)	60
Would like more LGB training	28 (47%)	32 (53%)		60
Transgender				
Supported someone trans in last 5 years	30 (50%)	25 (40%)	6 (10%)	61
Confident in supporting Trans	27 (45%)	11 (18%)	22 (37%)	60
Would like more transgender training	39 (67%)	20 (33%)		59
Support Services				
Knowledge of support services for LGBT+	28 (47%)	32 (53%)		60
Like more training re support services	40 (67%)	20 (33%)		60

The survey shows that while workers have high levels of engagement with LGB and to a lesser extent with trans men and women, they revealed varying levels of confidence in engaging with LBGT+ clients. High levels of confidence (82%) were indicated in supporting LGB clients, with 47% wanting more training. However, only 45% said they were confident in providing support to individuals who identified as trans, 66% want more trans training. Around half have knowledge of support services for LGBT+ people and two thirds, want more training in this area.

ii) Feedback from staff interviews and workshops

Variability in workers' confidence and desire for training

Follow-up interviews with 7 individual support workers were conducted after the online survey. They estimated that between 30% and 40% of people accessing homeless support services are LGBT+. The 7 interviewees, including those who are themselves LGBT+, reported not understanding some of the terms relating to gender and identity and to lacking confidence in providing adequate support or to converse with individual LGBT+ clients appropriately. Workers had witnessed staff not using the right pronouns, and all expressed the desire for training in this area. As one worker said:

> *"You can feel on the edge all the time, and training would help with this and give you more confidence."*

The 5 participants in the Frontline Fife workshop particularly emphasised the importance of adopting a person-centred approach to homelessness support in order to properly inform plans and ensure wrong assumptions are not made. They recognised that clarity about identity was part of this approach. The workshop sessions discussed cases where identity had been an important factor, for example where homeless people's mental health problems were linked to their inability to accept themselves as being LGBT+. It was also noted that identity is not always an, or the most, important issue – mirroring a point discussed in some of the literature (Matthew, 2020). At present there is only one service in Fife that records information on sexual and / or gender identity.

Only recently have we come to understand the importance of identity and the effect this has on how we see ourselves and how others see us and the impact this has on how we relate and engage within relationships and communities. Only by accepting the significance of identity for everyone can we truly become inclusive and person-centred. 'Black Lives Matter' has given us some insight into the meaning of identity and its importance with respect to feeling included rather than excluded.

Variability in 'Treatment' of trans people

The interviews revealed that homelessness support services do not have a consistent approach, with some treating trans people as they self-identity and offering support, and others rigid to the legal (birth) identity. One worker described a case where a trans male had been placed in female only

accommodation and left after only one week because that is not how he identified.

Frustration with inflexible systems

Replicating a view expressed by LGBT+ homeless interviewees, interviewed support workers also noted that extant electronic systems and questionnaires are inflexible when it comes to LGBT+ identity (see also England, 2019). Several expressed their frustration, viz.

> *"The systems are way behind, it is still a very male/female system and going on the legal paperwork, so you have to input what people identify as to make it clear… We have not had someone who is non-binary yet, but as a staff group, they have decided to leave it to the individual to decide what they prefer." (Online survey follow up, Interviewee 2)*

Challenging Homophobia

Although rare, it was reported that some staff (not among those interviewed) have explicit homophobic attitudes. This of course reflects a long standing issue prevalent in society at large. It was only in 2020 that gender-fluid and non-binary workers were recognised under the Equality Act in the UK. Furthermore, the *Homelessness Prevention and Strategy Group* minutes of March of 2020 highlight a 'longstanding issue' of local authorities requiring LGBT+ young people to provide a letter from their parents proving they are not allowed to return to their parental home (Scottish Human rights Commission, 2020b).

One of the main challenges for homelessness support services are the homophobic attitudes of some residents in supported and hostel accommodation. Support staff reported LGBT+ people being bullied by fellow residents because of their identity, with some being forced out as a result. For shared accommodation workers try their best to 'match' people up. However, one homelessness support service representative explained that there is not always the space to do this, citing as an illustration the case of a female resident who initially refused to share with a trans woman, but they told her she had nowhere else to go and she had to tolerate it. Staff recognised that having to share accommodation should mean those living together are in agreement and are comfortable to do so. Some workers felt that shared accommodation was a relic of the past; however, others pointed out instances where this had been mutually beneficial for those involved.

iii) Conclusion

All staff interviewees and workshop participants felt that asking the question about gender and identity should inform the type of support individuals want. Currently, homelessness support services have an inconsistent approach, with some treating trans people as they self-identify and others sticking rigidly to recorded birth certification. Staff expressed frustration with inflexible systems and emphasised a desire for LGBT+ training. The wider cultural challenge of prejudices towards LGBT+ people is felt to be more prevalent in

rural and deprived areas. From these responses it would seem, that while data around LGBT + identity is not being collected formally, staff are already asking these questions and supporting people accordingly and being self-reflective about their own practice. This research highlights the importance of choice for homeless LGBT+ individuals when it comes to housing options, but also, as acknowledged in the *Fife Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan*, is reliant on housing models being able to meet demands.

3.3 Findings from Policy Makers

> **Key Findings**
> - Taking a person-centred approach includes understanding about gender and sexual identity and formally collecting this data would help to inform present practice and future planning.
> - The present lack of consideration of LGBT+ needs would appear to be down to a variance in awareness and a consequence of prevalent heteronormative attitudes. This points to the need for data and also listening to LGBT+ people with lived experience of homelessness, so these voices become more embedded in policy making to ensure equality in service provision.

Introduction and Overview

Eleven professionals in lead roles influencing policy or service design and delivery of support and /or housing for LGBT+ people were interviewed (see Appendix III). Three were involved in education, two from health, three from local government, one from equalities and two directly related to housing.

i) Key Themes

Awareness of LGBT issues

Three respondents openly admitted that they had not considered the importance of identity in terms of service delivery but agreed that this should change.

> *"I don't think we are talking around this issue, we are just not talking about it at all…This is about more than identifying a problem, it is about understanding identity. At the moment, we help people fix their problems when they come into crisis…it is like trying to fill a bath up with the plug out." (Interviewee 6)*

Other interviewees reported being aware of the importance of gender and sexual identity but recognised this being lost because of the current lack of data. All interviewees felt that above all else, this is about providing a person -centred approach, and understanding people as a whole, supporting them accordingly using a partnership approach, within which identity should be an important component.

Identity, including sexual identity

Only one person expressed reservations about sexual identity being added as a category for data collection. Overall, it was felt that this information should be recorded in order to inform practice and ensure individuals get appropriate support. One interviewee discussed the "lack of imagination" around data collection arguing that by continuing to collect the same data and not reflecting on what other information may be useful, "evidence-based policy decision making" has stagnated. They also felt that this was part of a wider administrative problem in which commissioning around housing services was too risk-averse.

However, some of the participants expressed serious concern that while LGBT+ people may be being penalised by their queer status not being recorded, there was also a real (and present) danger that young people leaving a parental home and partners abandoning a relationship following declaration of an LGBT+ identity, would be categorised as intentionally homeless. The need for LGBT+ training of staff was emphasised.

Challenging Heteronormative Attitudes and Embracing Change

The reality of LGBT+ people not being asked about their gender or sexual identity and consequently not informing decision making was clearly regarded as a wider issue relating to the dominance of heteronormativity in wider society. Interviewees described cases of not treating trans people as they self-identify and of trans women fleeing abuse being turned away from support services set up for women. Of particular concern was the issue of hidden homelessness, with people in their search for secure accommodation moving away from the area and losing their local friendships and connections as a result.

Interviewees were very positive about the LGBT+ groups that currently exist and wanted to see LGBT+ rights taught in all schools, and for policy makers to be more aware of the need for inclusion and representation of LGBT+ voices.

One interviewee suggested that developing LGBT+ specific housing services could be an option and hearing from LGBT+ people directly about what they see as important. An interviewee advocated for homeless support services to lead by example, promoting diversity and encouraging staff to bring their "whole selves" to work, so that those who identify as LGBT+ feel that they can be open about it. These all point towards the need for more inclusive dialogue and confidence to discuss issues. Some progress is evident in this context with some housing support agencies explicitly adopting 'Equalities ad Diversity' policies which go beyond equal opportunities and protected characteristics, implementing the legislation in a wider context of inclusion.

ii) Conclusion

The evidence from policy makers strongly emphasises the need for a more inclusive dialogue on the interconnections between LGBT+ identify and access to housing. It further identifies the requirement for coordination and collaboration between those whose lives are affected by services, those who

deliver services and those who design them. Overall, the clear message from policy makers is that housing and housing support should promote a person-centred, human rights approach, which not only includes data recording of LGBT+ identity, but challenges entrenched assumptions of heteronormativity.

Information on LGBT+ identity would allow the development of more appropriate support plans and encourage more innovative and responsive practice. While identity is not the only consideration in LGBT+ homelessness, and for some, it may not even be the most significant, it is of central importance for many, and currently the absence of collected information on identity renders LGBT+ people invisible.

4. Conclusion: Reflections and Policy Issues

This research brings to the fore that rejection by family and partners for 'coming out' is common to all age groups and is a unique reason for LGBT+ people becoming homeless or being at risk of homelessness. The evidence in this report emphasises the complexity of LGBT+ life courses, with fluidity and confusion around gender identity colluding with poverty and rurality to exacerbate the experience of homelessness. LGBT+ people are at particular risk of hidden homelessness; a result of the combination of a reluctance on the part of some to be open about their identity through fear of intolerance and abuse, a lack of knowledge about and suspicion of the role of support services and, critically, the absence of systematic recording of sexual and gender identity in housing and homelessness records.

The need for a more inclusive dialogue clearly identified by policy makers connects with the desire of frontline workers to develop a better understanding of the vocabulary of LGBT+ discourse. An agreed and mutually understood language of communication is the key to developing the confidence and freedom for constructive discussion of identity and its consequences. Building a shared and mutually understood social repertoire would enable better engagement, transparency and empathy – all ingredients for purposeful change and service improvement.

Both policy makers and workers alike intimated that providing the right support is about being 'person-centred' – that is, focusing on the needs of individuals, ensuring that people's preferences, wishes and values guide decision making. Although 'person-centred' concepts were first introduced in the context of the delivery of social care, it is important that it is also understood in terms of what it denotes in relation to the development of respectful responses to issues of identity. This is likely to be challenging for policy makers and those who design and deliver housing support services.

'LGBT+' and 'homeless' are discrete 'labels' provoking stigma and prejudice. Together they compound the social ills of the 'roofless queer'.
Both need to be addressed, but combatting the prejudice and stigma associated with LGBT+ identity is arguably the most problematic. Evidence from this survey suggests that among the participating support workers and

policy makers there is an acceptance and welcoming of those with LGBT+ identities. What is also apparent, however, is that at all stages in the delivery and design of homelessness support there is a recognition on the part of staff of the critical need for awareness training. The collection of LGBT+ data was identified among surveyed staff as an essential step in righting the wrongs associated with the neglect (avoidance) of LGBT+ housing needs. Apparent also in the survey results was a thread of recognition that tackling LGBT+ prejudice and neglect would require addressing the altogether larger issue of the dominance of heteronormative codes in wider society.

This study reveals 'new' insights into the lives of LGB people and perhaps especially trans men and women living in rural areas or smaller settlements. Isolation, aggravated by being cut off from immediate and easy access to a supportive community, is compounded by the constant fear of 'exposure'. For some this meant not 'coming out' until they were much older, which had an adverse effect on mental health, leading even to hospitalisation. These accounts clearly demonstrate feelings of acute isolation and lack of acceptance, and the complex interaction between the fluidity and confusion that can exist around gender/sexual identity on the one hand and rurality and housing on the other.

Access to LGBT+ support groups emerged strongly as being especially important in affirming a positive identity and achieving a sense of belonging - a sense of belonging that had been achieved for the 7 LGBT+ participants who – at the time of survey - had their own tenancies. Each had lived through periods of homelessness, insecurity and relative poverty and bore testimony to the sense of wellbeing that access to safe and habitable shelter conferred. Having a stable secure home and one's own space is the foundation from which to thrive and can be fundamental in establishing a place in the community.

5. Recommendations

This small-scale research study, although limited in scope, has identified a number of key themes which, when considered alongside other findings, supports the general view that the needs of many LGBT+ people living in the UK, Scotland, and Fife are being overlooked or misrepresented within the housing sector. As a consequence, this may - and all too frequently does - place some at greater risk of homelessness.

Importantly, this study also highlighted that in Fife, there is a willingness by all parties from frontline workers through to mangers and policy makers, to drive forward change and make improvements across public and voluntary services, ensuring the lived experience of those within the local LGBT+ population are centre stage when shaping service delivery and policy making. Further, it is affirmed here, that 'identity matters' and while this research places a spotlight on LGBT+ identity, it is recognised that 'identity' matters for all and should be an integral part of person-centred care and public service delivery within the context of local communities.

With the above in mind, the following recommendations are made:

- Building on the Fairer Fife Commission's (2015, p 21) priorities for the instigation of an inclusive approach, establish opportunities for policy makers, service providers and those with lived experience to come together, within safe spaces, to start a dialogue on how best to bring about inclusive services which take account of the needs of LGBT+ people, with particular focus given to those experiencing multiple disadvantages.

- Accepting that some in the LGBT+ community are at risk of homelessness and given there is no formal evidence to establish the scale of need in Fife and Scotland, review current homelessness data collection to include the opportunity to be identified by gender /sexual identity and linked with this, expand the assessment of housing options to meet the specific needs of LGBT+ people.

- Frontline workers are committed to delivering person-centred support as a commitment to reducing inequalities. Building on this, formal training should be made available thereby empowering workers and LGBT+ people to develop meaningful client/worker relationships on an equal footing. This development should go hand in hand with encouragement to organisations to seek recognition under the LGBT Charter Mark for best practice (LGBT Youth Scotland, 2019).

- It is clear from this research that there is considerable ambiguity at present regarding the classification of LGBT+ people who have been rejected by parents or partners as 'intentionally homeless'. Based on a human rights-based approach, there is a need to review the assessment of 'intentionality' and in doing so, challenge attitudes and systems which reflect heteronormative conventions.

- Relationship breakdown is cited as one of the main reasons for homelessness in Scotland and Fife. There is a need for greater understanding of this issue in relation to LGBT+ homelessness particularly with regard to 'coming out'. As this study has shown in both the parental home *and* in adult partnerships, declaration of LGBT+ identify can be the trigger for relationship breakdown and consequent homelessness. However, as the life stories of many of our LGBT+ interviewees, both young and old, have vividly demonstrated the connection between 'coming out' and homelessness is rarely a simple linear relationship. Individual issues of mental health and societal issues of stigma are part of a larger, complex equation and therefore, need to be taken into account and further investigated (see Fraser et al, 2019).

- There is a policy and service delivery gap in terms of early intervention and prevention in relation to LGBT+ identity. As was highlighted in our report, LGBT+ education is available in very few schools. Our LGBT+ interviewees, of all ages, spoke about the confusion and apprehension experienced in 'coming out', and the lack of understanding in wider

society. Those working across different support services (including but going beyond housing and homelessness) need to take cognisance of this issue as fundamental to the mitigation of risk and the safeguarding of a potentially vulnerable LGBT+ population.

- Policy and practice should be ambitious and aspirational and in striving to meet people's 'needs' should endeavour to shape positive identities and safe and inclusive communities. Through prevention and education, policy and practice should help people understand of who they are and who they want to be and uphold zero tolerance to stigma and abuse and be accepting of difference.

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Appendices: Research Tools

Appendix I: Topic guide for those affected by or at risk of homelessness

Brief: As you know this study is about understanding the needs of those LGBT+ in Fife who have been/are homeless or been or are at risk of homelessness. No names will be used in the report and everything you say is confidential unless there is a risk of harm identified.

➢ Can you tell me about your situation?
➢ Can you describe your journey to this point?
➢ How do you think being LGBT+ affected your becoming or being at risk of homelessness?
➢ What support did you get and how did you get it?
➢ What worked well for you? What didn't work well?
➢ Did anyone from any support service ask you if you were LGBT+? How did that make you feel? Do you think they could have done more? Is there anything that could have been done differently or happened at an earlier stage that would have helped you?
➢ Do you think being LGBT+ affects your day to day life in Fife? If so, how?
➢ If you were in charge of support/homeless services in Fife, what would you change or improve, or keep the same?
➢ If you were in charge of support/homeless services in Fife, what would you change or improve, or keep the same?
➢ Beyond services, is there anything else you would you like to see change in Fife that would make your life better? (Any good practice? cultural change?)

Appendix II: On-line survey questions for housing services staff

1. Have you supported someone within the past five years who is lesbian, gay or bisexual?
	Response: Yes, No, Unaware of this issue impacting on individuals I have supported in the past
2. Did you feel confident in supporting them?
	Response: Yes, No, Unaware of this issue impacting on individuals I have supported in the past
3. Would you like more training in this area?
	Response: Yes, No
4. Have you supported someone within the past five years who is transgender?
	Response: Yes, No, Unaware of this issue impacting on individuals I have supported in the past
5. Did you feel confident in supporting them?
	Response: Yes, No, Not Applicable
6. Would you like more training in this area?
	Response: Yes, No

7. Do you know which services to direct LGBT+ people to for them to get specific support related to their sexual orientation?
>
> *Response: Yes, No*

8. Would you like more training in this area?
>
> *Response: Yes, No*

9. Which of the following approaches to training would you prefer:
- *Online/Web based*
- *Face to Face,*
- *I do not have a preference*

10. If you are happy for us to contact you again regarding this research please indicate below.

Response: Yes, I am happy for you to contact me by emailing xxxx,
> *No, I do not wish to be contacted.*

Appendix III: Topic guide for policy makers

1. Can you describe your role?

2. Do you think LGBT+ individuals should be recognised as a priority group within Fife when planning Homeless services? (Prompts: *Routine Data Collection, policy drivers which support LGBT+ needs, Housing/Temp Housing needs accommodated*)

3. Do you think policy makers recognise LGBT+ individuals as having specific needs? (If so can you give me examples of this and what does this mean? If not, how would you like to see this being developed?)

4. What do you think is the appetite for and barriers to enabling future planning and delivery of homelessness services to meet LGBT+ needs? (Prompts: particular challenges in Fife, Good practice?)

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