

The background of the cover is a photograph showing a hand on the right side, pulling a light-colored, textured curtain. Bright light is streaming through the opening in the curtain, creating a warm, golden glow that fills the left side of the image. The hand is dark-skinned and is shown from the wrist up, with the index finger pointing towards the left.

# **MEETING URGENT HOUSING NEEDS FOR DESTITUTE ASYLUM SEEKERS**

**EVALUATION OF THE HOPE  
PROJECTS (WEST MIDLANDS)  
RAPID ASSESSMENT BEDS  
(RAB) SERVICE**

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## Executive Summary

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This report presents an evaluation of the Hope Projects (West Midlands) Ltd. emergency night-shelter provision called Rapid Assessment Beds (RAB). The evaluation was delivered by staff from Nottingham Trent University and commissioned by Hope with funding from DLUHC. It began in January 2024 and was supported by Hope staff, Hope clients and a range of Hope referral partners. The evaluation draws on literature regarding UK government policies affecting asylum seekers, as well as reports and articles on homelessness, destitution, and related issues.

The report follows qualitative research methods and hence in-depth interviews were undertaken with five clients, seven referrers across six partner organisations and three Hope staff members. A follow-up survey was undertaken with 13 former RAB clients in October 2024 to gather data on their mid-term outcomes after leaving RAB provision.

The evaluation of Hope's Rapid Assessment Beds (RAB) service reveals its crucial role in addressing the immediate housing needs of refused asylum seekers facing severe destitution and homelessness. The service provides short-term accommodation at short-notice for a period of three months, filling a gap in provision that would otherwise leave people street homeless, and thereby making a valuable contribution to people's lives and providing a stepping stone to longer-term housing solutions.

### Background

Hope's RAB provision responds to urgent unmet housing needs and severe destitution which have been created by Britain's refugee and asylum policies. Starting with the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act and the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act, these laws have sought to deter asylum applications by severely restricting access to state welfare and increasingly stripping away fundamental rights from many of those seeking asylum.

A wealth of evidence demonstrates that the British asylum system's tight timelines exacerbate the risk of destitution created by other parts of the system. For instance, those granted asylum must leave Home Office accommodation within seven days, often resulting in homelessness where people cannot make new housing arrangements in time. Negative decisions require vacating the property within 21 days, with only 10 days to appeal. The Refugee and Asylum Seeker Voice report 'The Waiting Game' shows that long waits for asylum decisions is another factor pushing many people into destitution, with very serious consequences for mental and physical health.

The UK asylum system's complex and restrictive nature has led to increasing dependence on informal networks and charities. The 2023 NACCOM report states that many asylum seekers end up destitute and without housing after their claims are denied, exacerbated by limited legal aid and complex administrative processes. In this context organisations like Refugee Action, the Refugee Council, Positive Action in Housing, the British Red Cross, and The Hope Projects provide essential support for asylum seekers and refugees, but their resources fall far short of demand.

## Key findings

Our survey of former RAB clients show positive mid-term outcomes for at least 38% of RAB clients (five out of 13 surveyed, with most of the remainder uncontactable and their outcomes therefore unknown). These individuals were all facing extremes of destitution prior to accessing this service but following support from RAB they had either regularised their immigration status and gained access to mainstream housing or were on a pathway with a reasonable prospect of regularising their status in the future. Without RAB, and in the absence of other similar provision, it is very likely that all would have remained destitute.

The findings of this evaluation underscore the essential role of the RAB service in several critical areas.

First, the service plays a vital role in providing housing to individuals who would otherwise be left without shelter. By offering immediate relief, Hope's RAB service prevents homelessness and provides a safe place for those in dire situations. Clients interviewed for this evaluation consistently reported that the service was life-changing for them, offering not only physical accommodation but also stability and hope during a challenging period. In the words of one client:

*"... everything is perfect. The house is very clean and nice, it's a very comfortable place ... to live in. And then [it has] access to buses and ... shop system. It's also very good location. So, I feel very lively now, to be honest... I feel very grateful for what they [Hope] have done for me."*

Second, the RAB service facilitates the transition from short-term accommodation to longer-term housing solutions. The support provided by Hope helps clients stabilise their situation and progress toward securing more permanent housing by submitting a new claim for asylum or pursuing other legal action, depending on their individual circumstances, to regularise their immigration status. This transition is crucial for individuals who might otherwise remain in temporary or precarious living conditions without a clear path to a stable future, and whose precarity makes it difficult or impossible to adequately prepare a legal case for asylum.

The evaluation also highlights the positive impact of Hope's efforts in building strong relationships with other rough sleeper services. This collaboration work enhances the overall effectiveness of the support network, ensuring that clients receive comprehensive assistance and are well-supported throughout their journey. It also makes Hope's deep expertise regarding destitute asylum seekers available to the wider rough sleeping sector in the region.

Referring partners interviewed for this evaluation recognised the value of Hope's integrated approach, which together with the RAB provision includes longer-term accommodation, financial aid, and legal assessment, filling critical gaps in local provision. This integrated approach helps clients stabilise their situation and make progress with their asylum claims, filling a critical gap in local provision where other services may not offer the same breadth of integrated support. Partners noted that without the RAB service, many clients would have faced severe hardships or remained in precarious situations which would have been extremely dangerous and harmful to their health. In the words of one referrer:

*“I was just fortunate at that particular time that Hope could support this particular client because if they hadn’t have done, I don’t know where she would be right now”.*

While the RAB service was found by the evaluation to be highly effective in its use of available resources, areas of unmet need were identified that call for additional targeted funding. Many clients experience severe and prolonged stress due to the conditions of housing insecurity they face, which are exacerbated by the high level of demand outstripping current resources, and this can place additional pressure on clients, referrers and providers. Mental health support is an area needing further targeted resourcing, as an increasing number of clients require such assistance, but this goes beyond the scope of Hope’s current funding. The complexity of clients’ needs, compounded by limited access to mental health services, calls for stronger partnerships and potential in-house mental health support, which would need to be enabled by additional funding, to address these challenges more effectively.

To address these challenges and improve the effectiveness of the RAB service, several recommendations are proposed at the end of this report. These include establishing emergency response funds, funding in-house mental health programmes, and further expanding the range of services. Recommendations are also offered below for charitable funders and central government.

In conclusion, Hope’s RAB service is a crucial component of the support system for refused asylum seekers in the West Midlands, offering essential short-term relief and effectively facilitating the transition to longer-term housing. The service’s impact is profound, making a significant difference in preventing homelessness and supporting clients through a challenging and extremely risky period in their lives. This evaluation shows the critical and beneficial role of Hope’s RAB housing service in offering timely and necessary support to some of the most vulnerable individuals in the asylum system.



## Introduction

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Hope Projects (West Midlands) Ltd is an independent charitable company who works for destitute asylum-seekers and others who have 'no recourse to public funds' in England's West Midlands region. Hope's work assumes utmost importance in the light of the UK asylum system being complex, hostile and hard to navigate, which combines with a conditional approach to welfare provision to render many people destitute (Vickers, 2019). When somebody's asylum application is refused, they are often faced with homelessness and destitution with no right to work, housing or financial support. Hope tries to alleviate these conditions of destitution by providing housing, legal advice, and financial support for people who have been made homeless by the asylum system. The aim of Hope Projects is to challenge flawed refusals in the asylum system and provide support to overturn negative asylum decisions where possible. The severely restricted welfare support available to asylum seekers and a wider climate of hostile immigration policies and political and media rhetoric mean that refused asylum seekers are among the most vulnerable populations in Britain, forced to lead a life of fear and insecurity. In tackling this system, Hope follows a rights-based approach and firmly believes in placing the people they work with at the centre of their interventions.

Providing a stable and secure accommodation for refused asylum seekers while they are preparing a fresh asylum claim or appealing the rejection of their previous claim is one of the major interventions made by Hope. Hope has 11 properties across Birmingham, which include houses with two beds, three beds and four beds. Each client has their own room and will share a kitchen, lounge and bathrooms. They are encouraged to clean the house and cook for themselves. There is separate housing for males and females. The properties are donated by private donors, churches and housing associations. Hope pays the bills, council tax, provides all furniture and kitchen equipment and an internet connection. Hope staff ensure that there is always a stock of laundry liquid, toilet paper and regular cleaning supplies. Three bedspaces within these properties are reserved for RAB.

There are two types of accommodation that Hope currently offers. Firstly, Hope has a longstanding housing offer for a standard period of six months, to refused asylum seekers who are looking to progress with their asylum claim and are assessed as having a strong likelihood of success. This housing provision along with legal advice is intended to provide a conducive environment for the person to prepare their claim. However, this provision is limited in how quickly it can respond to immediate and urgent housing need for those who are currently destitute, because from the date of referral of a person to Hope, it typically takes around one month, and sometimes longer, to conduct a legal assessment of the strength of a person's asylum claim, and only once this has been completed and the Steering Group has met can a decision be made about whether or not to house. This system is necessitated by Hope's limited housing stock, which means that if housing were not directed in this way toward clients with strong asylum cases then all places would quickly become full of long-term tenants with no prospect of moving on, and Hope would be unable to take on any new clients. By focusing on clients who have a realistic prospect of moving on to other forms of housing via a new asylum claim, Hope can help many more people.

The development of a second strand of housing was prompted by the recognition that some asylum seekers can be left homeless and vulnerable while the assessment for Hope's

standard housing provision was being completed. To bridge this gap, a second type of housing provision was created by Hope and funded by the UK Government Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities Night Shelter Transformation Fund, referred to as Hope's Rapid Assessment Beds (RAB) provision. Started in 2022, RAB, also referred to by some interviewees as Rapid Beds, Rapid Accommodation or Rapid Referrals, provides housing for a period of three months based on a short-turnaround assessment of need and safety, while their application for Hope's longer-term housing is assessed.

This report presents an evaluation of RAB, addressing the following questions:

- What is involved in delivering Hope's Rapid Assessment beds, and the process a client would generally go through from referral to the next steps after they leave?
- What are the experiences of homeless refused asylum seekers in Hope's rapid bed housing? What difference do they feel Hope's housing has made to their life?
- What is the experience of referral organisations in referring to the Hope Rapid Assessment provision? What difference has the rapid housing made to their work?
- How are service needs going to develop in future in the local area? What are the key challenges and opportunities in delivering services?

The evaluation was delivered by staff from Nottingham Trent University and commissioned by Hope with funding from DLUHC. It began in January 2024 and has been supported by Hope staff, Hope clients and a range of Hope referral partners. The evaluation draws on literature regarding changes in UK government policies on asylum seekers, as well as reports and articles on homelessness, destitution, and related issues.

The report follows qualitative research methods and hence in-depth interviews were undertaken with five clients, seven referrers across six partner organisations and three Hope staff members. A telephone survey was also conducted with 13 previous clients of RAB to assess their current housing situations, receiving responses from five clients.

The report proceeds with a brief overview of the historical background to the issues Hope is seeking to address and a discussion of the national and local context. An overview of Hope's Rapid Assessment Beds (RAB) provision is then given, followed by a discussion of findings concerning the effectiveness of RAB in supporting people out of street homelessness, the onward transition of clients from RAB, and the process of referrals and development of relationships between Hope and referral organisations. The perspectives of referral organisations, Hope staff and clients, and consideration of key challenges and opportunities, are included throughout.

## Background

Britain's refugee policy has undergone significant changes over the years. Zetter & Pearl (1999) identify two major phases leading up to the 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act. From the Second World War until the 1990s, Britain received smaller numbers of refugees, primarily as quota refugees responding to specific crises. The process was state-controlled, and the narrative toward refugees was generally positive, with housing seen as crucial for resettlement.

In the late 1980s, due to global events and increased restrictions on other forms of migration, patterns of refugee movement to Britain changed. Sales (2002) notes a rise in non-quota refugees in the 1990s, who had to individually apply for asylum. This period saw a shift towards more restrictive immigration policy, focusing on preventing settlement and reducing public welfare expenditures. This policy shift focused on short-term solutions for seekers of asylum, particularly in their housing, with active discouragement of long-term settlement (Zetter & Pearl, 1999).

Three key legislative acts marked this shift: the 1993 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act, the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act, and the 1996 Housing Act. These acts complicated the asylum process, reduced legal protections, and further limited welfare entitlements for those whose leave to remain was denied. A widely criticised aspect of the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act was the replacement of cash benefits with vouchers, which were only redeemable at certain supermarkets and did not allow the purchase of certain items. This system increased moral surveillance on asylum seekers and was later replaced with digital Aspen cards. These changes increased the visibility of asylum seekers, exposing them to abuse and creating a distinct social category (Sales, 2002). A rhetoric emerged that stigmatised asylum seekers as 'undeserving' or 'bogus,' further marginalising them and increasing their social isolation (Zetter & Pearl, 1999; Sales, 2002).

The 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act introduced limited new rights, particularly for appeals, but also increased the Home Secretary's powers, expanded the use of detention, and ended local authorities' direct support for asylum seekers. The National Asylum Support System (NASS) was introduced as a separate housing system to 'disperse' asylum seekers, often to deprived areas with little notice and restrictive living conditions, subcontracting housing provision to local authorities and other agencies, which often resulted in substandard conditions and social exclusion (Zetter & Pearl, 1999; Sales, 2002).

In 2009, the Borders, Citizenship, and Immigration Act further restricted access to local authority housing and criminalised housing undocumented migrants. In 2012, outsourced housing contracts were awarded to private firms like Serco and G4S, which worsened conditions further due to cost-cutting measures (Vickers, 2019).

The 2014 Immigration Act introduced a 'right to rent' requirement and penalised private landlords who housed undocumented migrants, pushing more people who had been refused asylum into homelessness and extremely poor housing at the margins of society.

Today, positive asylum decisions require refugees to vacate Home Office accommodation within 7 days, often leading to homelessness. Negative decisions require vacating within 21 days, with only 10 days to appeal. A report by Refugee and Asylum Seeker Voice in 2017, 'The Waiting Game', emphasises how long waits for decisions push applicants into destitution, with serious implications for both their mental and physical health.



Homeless asylum seekers live in extremely precarious conditions, facing physical and social threats. Nettleton et al. (2011) emphasise the importance of evaluating emergency housing provisions to ensure that it provides a safe space and adequate support. Neal & Stevenson (2013) argue that night shelters are most effective when they facilitate institutional support, meet standards, and respect individuals' need for privacy and dignity.

Recent research by the NACCOM network, which links organisations providing accommodation to refused asylum seekers, shows the extreme destitution and homelessness among asylum seekers following a negative decision. The report reveals that many asylum seekers end up destitute and without housing after their claims are denied, exacerbated by limited legal aid and complex administrative processes. In 2022-23, NACCOM's member organisations housed 3,724 people, including refugees, asylum seekers with pending claims, and individuals with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). The individuals refused asylum often experienced severe barriers to fair asylum processing. The NACCOM report emphasises that post-COVID-19 conditions, the Ukraine war, and the Illegal Migration Act 2023 have all contributed to increased destitution. With limited "move-on" housing options, many refugees struggle to secure stable accommodation, leaving them reliant on NACCOM's network. The growing dependence on informal networks and voluntary sector support highlights the systemic challenges within the UK's asylum and migration system.

Hope's housing provision is essential because it addresses a critical need in the West Midlands, where there is a high concentration of asylum seekers, many of whom face destitution. The work of Hope is not just filling a gap but providing a model for effective, localised support that can be critical for the well-being of asylum seekers. Studying Hope's impact provides valuable insights into how targeted, community-based interventions can effectively meet the housing needs of asylum seekers.

### Local and national needs

Those we interviewed described severe and widespread difficulties for clients who have no recourse to public funds, as there is insufficient accommodation and support available to them, leaving them with only limited provisions. Many individuals are choosing to move to Birmingham, as other councils do not offer the same quality of housing, leading to an increase in the number of rough sleepers in the city.

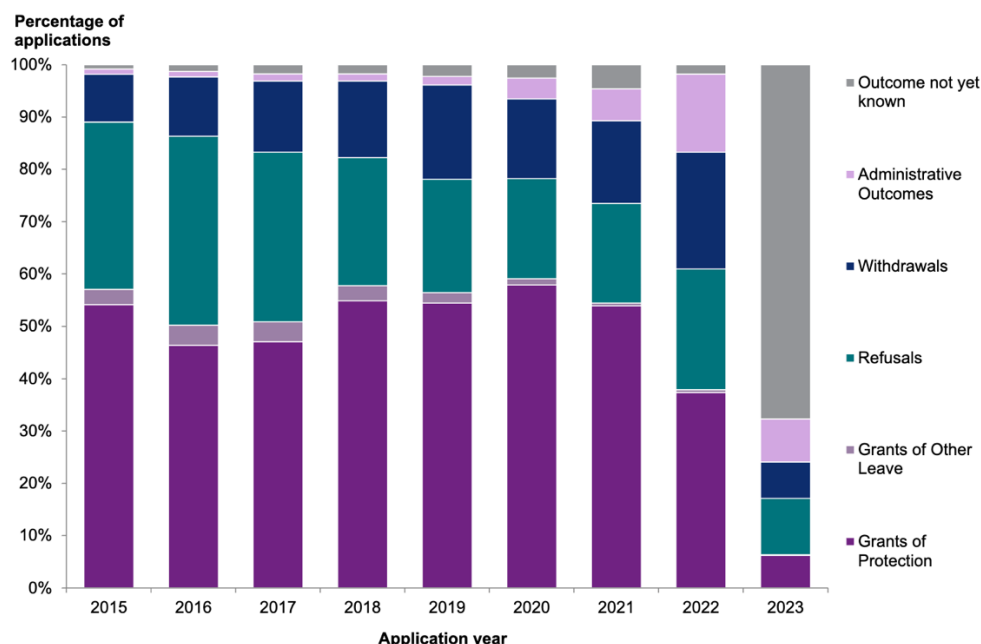
Presently, many are in asylum housing because they have pending appeals. The demand for destitution housing already significantly exceeds capacity, and as more appeals are concluded, those who are refused will add to the numbers who are destitute. This calls for an increase in funding for charitable provision, but more fundamentally urgent legislative reform to stop rendering people destitute in the first place.

Figure 1<sup>1</sup> shows recent historical trends in asylum applications in the UK

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<sup>1</sup> How many people do we grant protection to? Figure 5 -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2024/how-many-people-do-we-grant-protection-to#s5.4>

**Figure 1: Latest outcomes of asylum applications, by type of outcome, 2015 to 2023**

Source: Immigration System Statistics – June 2024, Gov.Uk

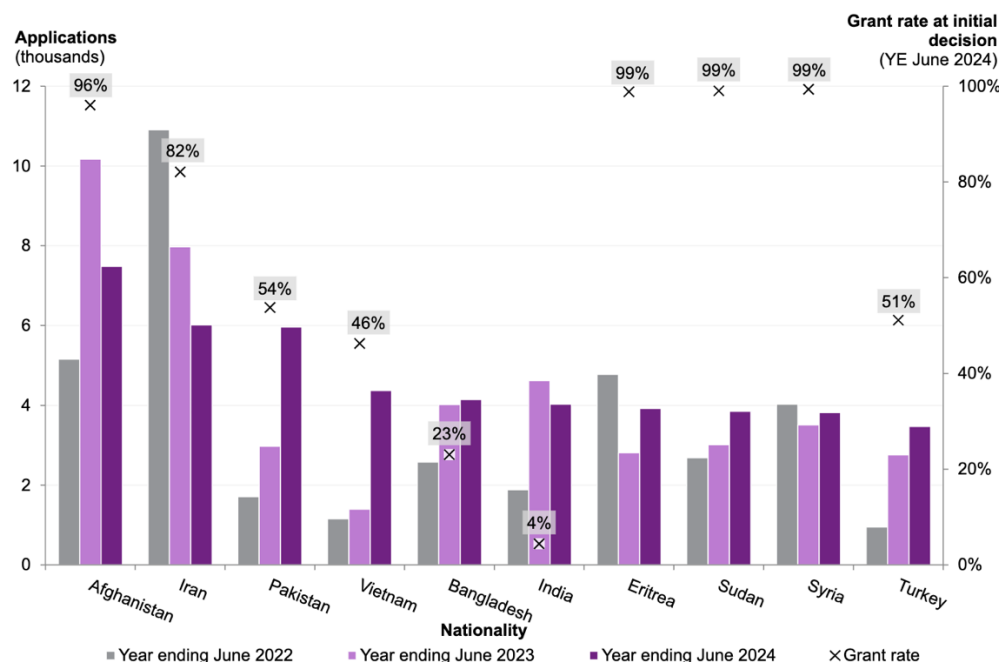
For 2023, 68% of applications still have unknown outcomes, reflecting long delays in decision-making which are known to increase the risk of destitution. There is also an evident year-by-year fall in the proportion of applicants receiving protection between 2020 and 2022. A previous evaluation of Hope's legal advice service (Vickers et al. 2024) found significant proportions of people who had been refused asylum and rejected again at appeal, but who with Hope's support were ultimately successful in securing leave to remain. Because there are many more refused asylum seekers than Hope has capacity to help, this suggests many people are being left destitute and unable to secure protection, despite having a claim that could ultimately be upheld with the right support.

Figure 2<sup>2</sup> highlights that while some nationalities have high numbers of applications and favourable outcomes, others face lower grant rates, pointing to a complex and varied asylum approval process.

<sup>2</sup> How many people do we grant protection to? Figure 2 -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/immigration-system-statistics-year-ending-june-2024/how-many-people-do-we-grant-protection-to#s5.4>

**Figure 2: Top 10 nationalities claiming asylum in the UK, years ending June 2022 to June 2024, and grant rate at initial decision (%), year ending June 2024**

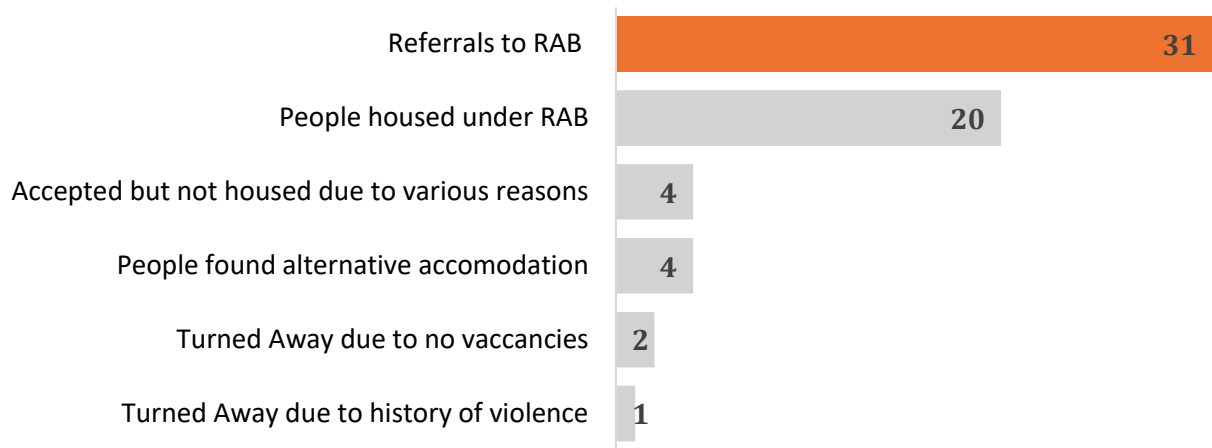


Source: Immigration System Statistics – June 2024, Gov.Uk

The level of demand for Hope provision varies according to the speed and number of asylum decisions, which can fluctuate. Often, a referral to Hope is prompted when someone is refused by the Home Office, goes to the courts, is refused again, and exhausts their appeal rights. When decisions are made in a short period of time for a large number of clients from a particular country, as has happened in recent years for Syria, Afghan and Sudan, then suddenly a lot of clients require accommodation, and it can be challenging for organisations to meet the sudden increase in demand. Hope staff reported that at one stage they were receiving relatively few referrals due to the Home Office making a limited number of decisions, but that this has now changed to the extent that urgent demand for beds far exceeds their capacity.

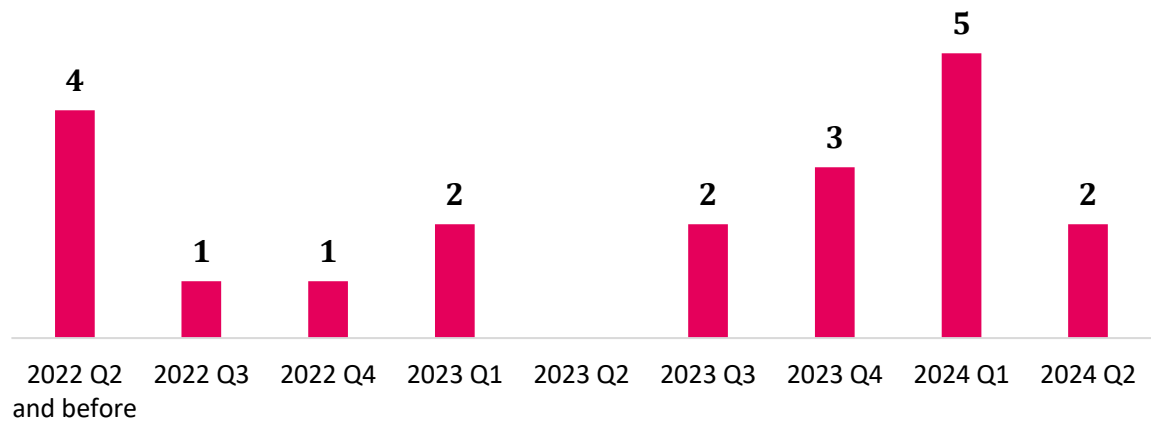
Data on Hope's Rapid Assessment Beds (RAB) that was provided to this evaluation by Hope highlights the fluctuating and urgent nature of the demand. As shown in Figure 3, 31 individuals were referred to the RAB service since it started, with 20 successfully housed. Of the remaining cases, four individuals were accepted but not housed due to non-arrivals or because they obtained alternative accommodation, while two were turned away due to no vacancies. One individual was turned away due to a history of violence.

Figure 3: Referrals under Rapid Assessment Beds (RAB) 2022-2024



Over time, the number of people housed under the RAB service has varied, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: People housed under Rapid Assessment Beds (RAB) 2022-2024



These data underscore the ongoing pressure on Hope’s resources and the critical need for expanded capacity to meet the demand for RAB housing, particularly during sudden surges in referrals. There are also many people who have stayed in the UK for almost 20 years, whose claims did not get progressed, either they were refused or did not have a strong claim. As a result, organisations report seeing many who are repeated service users, including those who have longstanding unmet housing needs.

In this context, the following section explains how Rapid Assessment Beds (RAB) are provided by Hope.

## Overview of Rapid Assessment Beds (RAB)

The RAB service was started in 2022 as an emergency provision to house refused asylum seekers on short notice. There are three bedspaces for RAB and clients can be housed through this service for a maximum of three months, during which time a full legal assessment of the client's case will be carried out, to inform a decision about whether to grant longer-term (six months) accommodation. In contrast to the usual accommodation system operated by Hope, where the client has to wait for a legal assessment of the strength of their case before they can be housed, the rapid accommodation aims to house the client within five working days of having received the referral. Once a legal assessment has been completed, the case is then presented to the steering group for a decision as to whether to offer longer-term housing.

The aim of the RAB provision is primarily to provide immediate support for those who are street homeless, ensuring that rough sleepers and the agencies that assist them have access to essential services. It also intends to help individuals currently residing in Section 4 accommodation that is coming to an end, or those living with friends and family but unable to continue doing so in the long term.

The criteria for Hope's standard, six-month housing, due to limited availability, is not solely based on vulnerabilities but on those who have a plausible 'route out' of the asylum system that would be necessary to transition to more secure housing beyond Hope's provision. This approach ensures that the accommodation is utilised effectively and remains available for new clients.

The assessment of the strength of a client's asylum claim, before admitting them to Hope's standard housing provision, can be completed quickly in some cases if all necessary documents are readily available. However, it often requires a lengthy process of chasing documents, which may include contacting previous solicitors for client care letters or requesting access to records from the Home Office or other sources. This process typically takes between one and two months. Hope has established a provision of up to three months for RAB housing to enable clients to be housed while this assessment is completed. This is also intended to provide clients with adequate time to explore alternative housing options, in case their application for standard Hope housing is rejected.

Hope has a wide range of partnerships with statutory and charitable organisations working in the migration and homelessness sectors who are the main referrers of clients to Hope. The process of referral begins when a referring organisation calls or emails Hope staff to ask if there are bed spaces available. If there is a bed space, then they will complete a referral form and upload it on a shared drive. The client is contacted by Hope and a member of staff meets them to carry out a risk and needs assessment. The risk assessment happens in two stages, from the referring partner's end as well as by Hope. After the assessment, Hope decides whether they are going to house the client depending on their risk. Decisions to house are made where there is confirmed need and the assessment outcome is 'safe to house'.

Hope will let the referrer know about their decision to house or not. The duration of accommodation given is usually the days remaining in that calendar month and the following two months. Thus, the rapid beds are given for a maximum of three months.



If the decision is made to house a client, they are taken to the allocated property, and a health and safety assessment is conducted. Once the client is housed, the legal team is informed about the new client for the legal assessment. They assess the asylum case of the client to gauge whether there is an opportunity to successfully challenge the flawed refusal of the Home Office.

During the stay in RAB, the clients also receive support from housing support officers and Hope's Wellbeing Project. The support includes registering them with a GP if they are not already registered, or transferring them if the GP with which they are currently registered is far away. The client is helped to obtain an HC2 certificate if they do not already have one, which entitles them to free prescriptions. Clients are also referred to other agencies for support depending on their needs, such as mental health support or clothing provision.

The conclusion of the legal assessment of the strength of a client's case is brought to a monthly Steering Group Meeting (SGM), made up of Hope's referring partners, who make the decision about who should and should not be housed. Hope staff do not have a vote in these decisions about who to house. If the decision of SGM is 'Yes', then the client's stay gets extended to six months and the client can remain in Hope housing while they continue with gathering evidence for their case.

As clients coming through RAB are housed only based on an assessment of whether they have need for housing and are safe to house, they do not go through SGM at the point of entry to Hope services. They go through SGM once the legal assessment of their case has been completed. RAB enables the client to be housed while the legal assessment is carried out and is therefore a vital bridge to alleviate immediate and urgent destitution. The SGM also acts as an interface for rough sleeper organisations and migration sector organisations to learn from each other. This enables capacity building.

## Findings

In this section we report the evaluation findings concerning the effectiveness of the RAB service in accommodating people who would otherwise be sleeping rough and the impact this service has made in developing collaboration between Hope and rough sleeping services. The report then reviews key challenges identified by the evaluation, and proposals from participants for further development of the service.

### Supporting people to move out of street homelessness

Of the clients who were interviewed, all had a generally positive response to the RAB housing provided by Hope. They were all referred to Hope by one of their referral partners, and their experiences are illustrated by the quotations below:

“It was good. Yeah. It was helpful... There is a waiting list. And you give them your details, your documents, everything, and they will process it. And after that, it takes time, but then finally, they give me a chance. It’s enough.” (Client P1)

“[Hope accommodation is] cozy and big... And personally, I’m talking about my case needs. We need them. They [Hope] are there to help us. The accommodation also is good. Anything that we need, we have. Everybody, they’re good with us. Always there to support us. They were there to listen, and they were asking questions. In all what I can say, they were very kind”. (Client P2)

“... everything is perfect. The house is very clean and nice, it’s a very comfortable ... place to live in. And then [it has] access to buses and then, you know, shop system. It’s also [a] very good location. So, I feel very lively now, to be honest... I feel very grateful for what they [Hope] have done for me.” (Client P4)

Client P4 further said, regarding access to Hope services, that:

“... it was very easy and quick ... it wasn’t really hard at all because I spoke to them, and then three days after I had a call from Hope and they give me a week to hold on so they could prepare a place for my situation. And then just ... a week, as they said, everything was in order. And then they gave me a call to come around to take assessment of me. And then, they gave me accommodation straight away. So, it wasn’t really difficult at all. They talk to you nicely. They ... respect who you are. And ... it’s really, really great. I think they are doing a very, very good job.’.

Referral partner R2, from an organisation which primarily works with refugee and migrant women, mentioned that as people are generally happy not to be homeless, they usually give positive feedback. On similar lines, some of the clients say that they have been homeless many times and really appreciate just any roof they find themselves under. However, Hope ensures more than just a roof, as client P4 says:

“I’ve been homeless for so many times and not the first time, so I appreciate any roof that I come or find myself under, no matter how it is, how the condition. But what they’ve [Hope] given me, it’s more than grateful, to be honest... It’s a very nice place, lovely and friendly people around. So, for me, it’s a 10 out of 10 for me”.

Referral Partner R5, from an organisation that provides humanitarian aid, says:

“I think they [clients] are happy with accommodation because first of all, it’s a good accommodation for them to have. Like there’s no ... complaints that there’s no water, there’s no heating such like, we have never heard of that. And also, because they have housing officers, I think if there’s any disputes as such, it’s being addressed by the whole housing [team]. So again, it doesn’t come to us [for any complaints] regarding that”.

Referral partner R4, from an organisation with a mission to support survivors of modern slavery, noted that her client’s mental health has improved after moving into Hope housing via RAB. The client was able to make friends there and proactively participated in a groupwork event which they would not have done previously. Hope provided a welcoming atmosphere in contrast to the previous isolating accommodation for the client. They said:

“The client’s mental health is visibly better. I’ve seen her a couple of times since she’s moved into the property. She’s more local now to the needs and services that she’s using, so she doesn’t have to travel for an hour and a half. Whereas before she had a really long traveling time and she was really isolated... she’s also made friends there, whereas before the property that she was in, the NASS accommodation, I think she was quite ostracised. She was physically, visibly depressed, whereas now, I mean, we ran a group environment the Monday before, and she came to it, we took some clients out ... to an event, and she would never have done that before, but she got public transport to the location, she met us, and she was, she’s visibly in a far better place mentally since moving into Hope’s support, which is fantastic. It’s good to see”.

As noted previously, clients are also provided with financial and wellbeing support while in RAB provision, and Hope supports clients to get registered with a GP if they have not already done so. The financial support is given for a total of six months. Even when clients move on from RAB and if they leave Hope housing after three months following the RAB period, they are still given financial support for another three months. One of the Hope staff interviewed mentioned that if the client is not allocated longer-term Hope house this continued financial support helps clients find accommodation from among their contacts because it enables them to contribute something to household expenses.

While accommodated in RAB housing, clients also have access to a range of other support. For example, Hope organises a client group every month as a platform to meet with each other and share good food. The staff report that this prevents the isolation of clients as they can see others in a similar situation to themselves. They are given a space to encourage, inspire and

empower each other. Clients are given a bus fare to attend. Speakers are also sometimes invited to these events, who might have legal knowledge to speak on topics such as how to gather evidence or might for example deliver a creative art session. Hope sometimes takes clients on trips, with past destinations including Somerset and Wales. Clients facing mental health issues are signposted to appropriate agencies where these are available, although there were important gaps in provision noted in this field.

An increasing number of people who are referred to Hope require mental health support or may struggle with substance addiction commonly associated with rough sleeping. This is especially the case in the RAB service. A Hope staff member reported:

“We’ve seen ... an increasing proportion of the people who are referred to us are people who have quite severe mental health problems ... increasing number of people with problems of substance misuse, substance addiction, all the things that are associated with rough sleeping ... that is difficult and there’s alongside the issues with the asylum system, we’ve got all the problems of difficulties of accessing health care, difficulties of accessing mental health care particularly, which everyone’s got, but they’re doubly so if you’ve got no access to public funds ... you don’t have a right to secondary health care. Or don’t have a right to free secondary health care”. (Hope staff)

The staff member suggested that Hope needs stronger partnerships around mental health and substance abuse and if they could offer a new and additional service to add to their current provision, it would be in-house specialist mental health support.

RAB housing also connects with Hope’s legal advice, as illustrated by the following quotation:

“I was ... homeless, when I met with the Hope. So, they give me accommodation. They helped me with the immigration status. And I'm going to do now fresh claim with my immigration status next Monday. So, it was helpful”. (P1)

Client P4 emphasised the widespread need for such provision, saying:

“I think whatever they are doing at the moment is very great. And then I wish them, keeping up, you know, helping people like us. Because there's a lot of people on the streets who really, really need help, you know, asylum seekers and immigrants. And if they keep on putting up this kind of good work, I think it will change many people's lives.... Just as Hope did for me... So, I'm very grateful to be honest”.

Overall then, RAB provides an effective service that addresses urgent cases of street homelessness and is highly valued by clients and referral partners.

The main challenge reported by staff is the lack of bed spaces as they have only three bed spaces for RAB. Staff reported that sometimes there were no clients for rapid beds, but some had to be kept vacant to allow for new and unpredictable demand, while at other times demand exceeded capacity. Referrer R5 argued that there is a tension between making good use of

beds and keeping some capacity as they never know when an increase in cases might come. For those beds allocated by the SGM, they want to support as many people as possible with the beds that are available, but they also have to consider that allocating bed this month means that next month fewer will be available and there might be more people with different vulnerabilities and more acute needs. That is a case-to-case challenge they face due to limited resources.

### **Progression from RAB service to longer-term housing provision**

From Hope's perspective, the ideal move-on pathway for clients is to progress towards obtaining refugee status or Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR), with Home Office accommodation on the basis of an active asylum claim serving as a common intermediate step. Typically, a client would submit a new asylum claim, and once they gain access to Home Office accommodation, they would no longer require Hope's housing support. This pathway aims to provide a sustainable solution and pathway toward housing security and stability for clients.

Once a person's legal assessment has taken place while they are accommodated in RAB housing, the client's case is presented in a Steering Group Meeting (SGM), which is attended by the partner referral organisations, enabling a potential move into Hope's longer-term six-month housing provision. The organisation who referred the client presents the case and then the legal team provides their assessment of the client's case and the actions taken by the client so far to progress their claim. The SGM prioritises cases based on the legal prospects of the asylum claim and the vulnerability of the client. After hearing the assessment of the legal case presented by Hope staff, the steering group members vote. The Hope staff in the meeting do not vote. If a partner has referred a client whose case will be discussed at that SGM meeting, then their attendance at that SGM is compulsory in order to present the case. Birmingham City Council also refers to Hope and therefore has representation on the SGM. These arrangements provide for the accountability of referral organisations, by involving them in decisions about clients they have referred, and ensures that the SGM is as well informed as possible in making its decisions.

The SGM meetings are conducted either in person or online. If a client in RAB housing receives a majority 'Yes' vote to house them, their accommodation is extended to a period of six months, which is the usual license agreement period for Hope accommodation. If the majority vote 'No', the client has to move out of the RAB at the end of three months. If there is a majority vote of 'not yet decided', this indicates that crucial information is missing which could impact the client's legal prospects, and the case is heard again in the next SGM, with the aim of having the missing information now included.

If the SGM decision for a client currently in RAB housing is 'No', then the client is usually left with almost a month in Hope housing before having to move out. During that period, Hope helps the clients look at all the options they have. They are not left immediately stranded if the SGM decision is no. When clients are in RAB, the Hope staff talk to the client around a month prior to the SGM, explaining the process and letting them know that there is a chance their accommodation might end. They discuss alternative options with them, they are encouraged to go over their contacts and start talking to people who they think might house them. They also have the same conversation with the partner organisation that referred the client, so they can speak to the client as well and help them work through their options. Another move-on



pathway for clients is the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), a system established by the UK government, under the Home Office, to identify and support individuals who may have experienced trafficking or modern slavery, including some vulnerable asylum seekers. At the end of a client's stay in Hope accommodation under the RAB provision, caseworkers in the referring organisation can make an NRM referral for the client. The referring partners can also signpost clients to other shelters and homeless accommodations in Birmingham. This expresses a high degree of commitment to supporting clients to remain housed through whatever means possible.

Referrer R3 reported that if the SGM decision, is a majority no, meaning that the client has to move out of the service at the end of three months, this experience of receiving some housing security for a short period, and then having it taken away, can also cause stress. Again, this points to issues beyond the control of Hope or any charity, and highlights the urgent need for legislative changes to end this state-enforced condition of precarity.

A follow-up telephone survey was conducted for this evaluation with 13 clients of RAB to understand their housing situation following support from RAB, using contact details provided by Hope. Of these 13 clients, it only proved possible to reach six clients, of whom five agreed to answer the survey and one declined. Of the remaining seven, despite repeat calls three went straight to voicemail each time, one call was never picked up, and three numbers were no longer operable. This is indicative of the precarity facing RAB clients, which makes it difficult to maintain a consistent phone number. In some cases, this may reflect extremes of destitution or a departure from the UK, but in other cases the client may have progressed to a more secure situation and have simply changed their number for some reason. Among the five survey respondents, one client had been granted leave to remain in the UK and was now living in private rented housing. The remaining four clients had all transitioned to Hope's longer-term, six-month accommodation and were still in this housing at the time of the survey. Of these four:

- One reported they were currently preparing a new asylum claim with support from Hope's legal advice service
- One was gathering new evidence to file an appeal, also with assistance from Hope
- One had an active asylum claim and was being supported by Hope's legal team
- One was preparing to file an asylum claim, working with their own solicitor

Overall, these survey findings show positive mid-term outcomes for at least 38% of RAB clients. All of these were facing extremes of destitution prior to accessing this service but following support from Hope's RAB provision they had either regularised their immigration status and gained access to mainstream housing or were on a pathway with a reasonable prospect of achieving this. Without RAB, and in the absence of other similar provision, it is very likely that all would have remained destitute.

Referral partner R3, from a migration sector organisation, expressed the opinion that irrespective of a person being an asylum seeker or not, the accommodation provisions in Birmingham are generally not good. Hence, when a person comes out of Hope

accommodation, the prospect of finding a house is very difficult and they may be forced to stay in a shared house that may not be maintained well. Some asylum seekers face an additional challenge of language barriers while searching for housing. This highlights the wider conditions of housing insecurity, which are beyond Hope's control but add to the importance of their work. Some referrers highlighted areas of housing need that fell outside of the RAB model, and may identify need for further additional provision. For example, Referrer R1 suggested there is a need for emergency provision for urgent cases, with an even faster capacity to react than RAB's usual five-day assessment window:

"... if there's an emergency case, if someone's just come into Birmingham and they've got [to] sleep on the streets and they're waiting for an answer, the emergency provision should be there, like five days [the standard period for RAB risk assessments] isn't really an emergency"

Addressing a different kind of need, Referrer R5 suggested that Rapid Beds could be an option for clients with additional vulnerabilities, such as health conditions.

"... [There needs to] be an option for them [clients] if they have another vulnerability. So, let's say health conditions, they have vulnerability... If that's taken into account, then we would make a referral to Rapid Beds"

However, as the allocation process currently stands the RAB beds are directed toward finding people who have a prospect of a 'route out' of destitution through the regularisation of their immigration status, usually via a new asylum application. This is due to practical necessity and inadequate resources – in the absence of sufficient resourcing to house everybody who has an urgent need, if Hope were to allocate housing solely based on need as the referrer above proposes, then all beds would quickly become filled with indefinite tenants, and the organisation would be unable to house any new clients. By directing housing to those who have a plausible route out, Hope can help many more people into housing over the long term.

### **Building relationships between Hope and rough sleeper services**

The RAB provision makes an important difference to clients' lives and fills significant gaps in local provision, for example where time is needed to gather documents and assess the strength of a client's asylum case, or where there are other circumstances that have led to a gap in access to housing and therefore urgent need.

The difference this made to clients' lives is expressed in the following accounts:

"[Life] changed so much because, now I have a place... [Hope] give me a place to wait. A good place." (client P2)

“[The difference Hope has made to my life is] like a lot. Because I don’t have a house [at] that moment and I don’t have any a person that helped me financially. So that [Hope] helped me a lot because I’m in college. They helped me”. (client P3)

“... so since I’ve moved here, since I settled in the accommodation, it’s been very grateful for me. It’s a very, very big step they’ve made in my life. It’s a big change, you know, and I really appreciate the support they’ve made for me so far...I was on this page, you know, hopeless. I didn’t have no hope. I didn’t know where to go. I didn’t know how to, I almost lost [my] life. I felt I don’t have life anymore, but I came across Hope and then they give me ... life again”. (client P4)

Referrer R2 says that in their professional experience asylum seekers are often precarious and exploited. Hope provides housing and money, and allows people to progress with their cases. They said, “Hope is good. It provides the need to help people who are refused at a time that no one else will help them”.

Referrer R3, from an organisation that provides a range of responsive homeless support services, remarked that Hope had opened up new options for them with both accommodation and legal assessment, enhancing the service they were able to offer their clients. For many of their clients, if they did not have Hope project, then they would have nowhere to go:

“we’ve had quite a lot of issues in terms of knowing where to send asylum seekers. We’ve had quite an increase in the amount [of clients]... Before we knew about the Hope project, it was something we really struggled with in knowing ... what the next steps were. So actually, being able to have them as an option has been really, really helpful. I think for me as well, it’s not just the accommodation, but it’s just knowing we’ve got the legal side of it as well. And so, obviously the rapid assessment beds are amazing. I think the black and white of it is if they didn’t have the Hope project, they’d have nowhere”.

This was reinforced by other partner organisations, including Referrer R4, who gave the example of a client who was being evicted from NASS accommodation and was able to get accommodation in Hope through a RAB referral. Referrer R5 reported that their own service does not provide accommodation, so Hope made “an immense difference for the people that we refer because otherwise they would be street homeless”.

There were also challenges reported in the referral process. As noted previously, the first risk assessment is conducted by the referring partner, followed by an assessment by Hope prior to the client moving in. Referral partner R5 described difficulties fulfilling their expected role in the risk assessment process, reporting that although they are the initial point of contact, their limited contact with some clients might not allow for a comprehensive risk assessment:

“... as a referring partner, for us, a person that comes with a need and the interaction, we might have limited to one appointment with a person, so we wouldn’t be the best [people to give an informed] judgment. But if there’s any red flags, we are the first ones

to pick it up. But secondly, it's the Hope housing. They have to do a risk assessment because our service does not provide housing, so we wouldn't consider all the risks. While somebody providing housing, they would understand what risks are in the housing". (referrer R5)

Responding to such cases, the RAB process has now been changed to supplement the referral partner's risk assessment with a further risk assessment conducted by Hope.

While important to maintaining client safety, the time taken for the risk assessment was also identified as creating tensions. Referral partner R1, from an organisation focused on homelessness prevention, reported that it can be challenging waiting for a response from Hope before informing a client of the next steps.

"... every time that I do refer people over, I have to wait for a response [from Hope] to let the client know what's going on. If someone's rough sleeping and I send it up to Hope Project and Hope Project says we've got no rooms, you put stress onto that person then. So, until I get an answer, we don't tell the client what's going on". (referrer R1)

In such conditions of acute precarity, even a short delay in hearing whether a bed is available can be extremely stressful. Referrer R3 expressed similar experiences, and suggested that they would appreciate more regular communication from Hope while waiting for a decision about RAB allocation. At the same time, the effort to move people quickly into accommodation was also reported as a source of stress, as referral partner R4 described:

"I mean the window was narrow... I fully understood ... Hope's objective around it, they're not going to reserve a space for her [client] because if the [client's] eviction didn't take place and she remained at her NASS accommodation where she's safe and if Hope then have another referral in, they're not going to reject that referral on the basis that my client may want to come in to do this. So, I fully understand Hope's protocol and it was a narrow window, and it is quite stressful. It's stressful for the client, because she was the other side of the West Midlands, so she had to get a taxi with all of her belongings and while she was unloading her belongings out of the taxi, one of her suitcases got stolen... it's stressful for everybody, but I fully understand why it has to be like that. And it's stressful for us because there's 23 other clients that we work with, and because we don't know what time the [client's] eviction is happening, we don't know what time she can get over to the meeting place with Hope... there's lots of things ... to take into consideration. So, other than the bag being stolen, it did go quite smoothly, to be fair. It could have been a lot worse, but yeah there are challenges." (referrer R4)

These stresses reflect the level of insecurity imposed by the asylum system, and in particular the short notice often provided by the Home Office and subcontracted housing providers regarding changes to housing. The ability for any charitable provider to mitigate this stress is

limited, and this evaluation found no clear changes Hope could make to further reduce the uncertainty that clients face, beyond continuing to process RAB applications as quickly as possible, and maintaining regular communication with the referral partner throughout.

All referrers reported that Hope had made their service more effective by providing them an option of accommodation to their clients, under circumstances where other provision was not available. Hope is exceptional in bringing together accommodation, financial support, legal assessment and advice and wellbeing services. All referral partners further expressed that Hope was easy to work with and provides quality services to the clients they refer. Referral organisations reported that they found the process of referral to be fairly simple and Hope staff to be approachable. While the steering group has always made the decision on housing rejections with input from the referring agency who have been present in the meeting, the specific reasons for these rejections were not always recorded. Building on the early experience of the steering group, Hope now maintains documentation of the reasons why clients are rejected for accommodation, enhancing clarity and consistency of the decision-making process.



## Recommendations

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The following recommendations aim to draw on these evaluation findings to promote humane treatment, access to essential services, and sustainable solutions for refused asylum seekers affected by homelessness and destitution.

### For Charitable Funders

- **Fund Emergency Response and Innovation:** There would be value in establishing emergency response funds that Hope and similar organisations can access in times of crisis, enabling the charity to respond effectively to unforeseen events such as sudden policy changes or clients with complex vulnerabilities. Additionally, supporting innovative approaches and pilot projects can help organisations like Hope to develop new models of intervention and share best practices across the sector.
- **Strengthen Flexibility through Reserved Bed Funding:** We propose that funders should prioritise providing long-term, sustainable financial support that allows for spare capacity in housing provision to accommodate sudden changes in demand. This stability would allow organisations like Hope to plan and execute extended programs, ensuring sustained support for destitute individuals. Since Hope currently prioritises the use of available beds and sometimes struggles to justify leaving beds vacant in anticipation of future rapid referrals, funders should consider supporting the funding of additional beds. This would provide essential flexibility during emergency situations when there is a rapid influx of clients, ensuring Hope can respond swiftly without compromising its ongoing support capacity.
- **Support an In-House Mental Health Program** - Consider funding an in-house mental health support programme to address the complex needs of destitute asylum seekers, further strengthening holistic care and support within the organisation.
- **Extend Housing Provision:** During the evaluation, referrers suggested that focusing accommodation based solely on vulnerability could be beneficial. However, due to Hope's limited provision, the organisation prioritises clients who have a viable 'route out' of the asylum system to ensure that their limited resources are used effectively. If the criteria were based solely on vulnerability, there is a risk that all available housing could quickly become occupied by individuals who might not progress, leaving no accommodation for new clients. This highlights the need for a broader charitable provision to support vulnerable homeless people with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) at larger scale and over the long term.
- **Adopt Holistic Success Metrics:** The measure of successful project delivery should go beyond the number of people supported with immediate needs and should

encompass the holistic and in-depth support provided to each client, including housing provision, legal assistance, well-being support, and the overall improvement in their quality of life. Measurement of outcomes should also assess the contribution of a particular project to clients' long-term outcomes. The most critical metric in this case is whether RAB helps clients to move towards a situation where they have the right to reside in the UK, and to access housing, work and healthcare. This may require evaluation funding that extends beyond the period of project delivery. This approach ensures that funding decisions reflect the true impact of a charity's work and its effectiveness in facilitating long-term positive outcomes for clients.

### For Hope and other Service Providers

- **Develop a Database of Services for Signposting** – This evaluation recommended that Hope develop a simple spreadsheet listing services for signposting, to help foster effective collaboration among stakeholders and ensure continuity of care, especially during staff transitions, thereby improving client referral processes and supporting efficiency. This is now being developed by Hope's Wellbeing project, and might also be of benefit to other charities.
- **Strengthen Risk Assessments:** This evaluation recommended that Hope review the process for risk assessments, including consideration of further formalising and standardising the process and appointing a dedicated assessor. Hope has implemented these changes, appointing the Operations Manager as the dedicated assessor and adopting a formal risk assessment system. This sets an example that other charities might benefit from in developing their own risk management practices.
- **Improving Communication and Logistical Support:** Measures to enhance communication between referring partners and Hope could help address concerns raised by some partners, including more regular updates while waiting for a RAB decision and after a client is placed in Hope accommodation. The importance of ensuring all staff members from referral partners who need it have access to necessary shared drives was also raised. And consideration of how to streamline digital referral processes to reduce the administrative burden.

### For Central Government

- **Reform Asylum Policies:** The UK Government should address the systemic causes of homelessness and destitution exacerbated by the UK asylum system. The current restrictionist policies that focus on control rather than meeting need render people destitute and create undue pressure on services like Hope. The time for eviction and appeal periods for individuals whose asylum claims are refused should be extended, providing asylum applicants with adequate time to seek legal remedies and alternative housing solutions.

- **Protect Recourse to Public Funds:** It should be ensured that individuals awaiting asylum decisions or those who have been refused retain access to public funds. This crucial support will enable them to access basic necessities and maintain dignified living conditions while navigating the asylum process and seeking stable housing solutions.
- **Expand Right-to-Work:** Grant asylum seekers the right to work, empowering them to contribute economically and integrate into society. This policy not only promotes self-sufficiency but also alleviates pressure on social services by enabling individuals to support themselves and access suitable housing options.

## Conclusion

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This evaluation of Hope's rapid assessment night shelter housing service underscores the critical role it plays in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by asylum seekers. Reflecting on local needs, as articulated by referral organisations and Hope staff, and the literature reviewed, it is evident that the demand for these services is shaped by a complex interplay of policy restrictions, housing shortages, and the unmet needs of refused asylum seekers with no recourse to public funds. This is added to by the increase in homelessness and destitution in the UK due to decreased spending on social housing, unaffordable private renting and 'right to rent' restrictions conditional on immigration status, temporary housing provisions working at capacity and a general increase in cost-of-living pressures.

Hope clients have often struggled significantly prior to receiving support from the charity, with insufficient accommodation and support. Birmingham, as a city, faces an influx of rough sleepers due to the comparative strength of housing provision compared to other councils. The challenge is compounded by increased homelessness and need for public education to counteract negative and bigoted views.

The refusal of asylum claims remains a growing issue, with housing being a persistent and urgent need for those affected. Many long-term residents with unresolved claims continue to rely on services like Hope, illustrating the ongoing and widespread need for housing solutions.

This evaluation has identified the critical and beneficial role of Hope's RAB housing service in offering timely and necessary support to some of the most vulnerable individuals who have sought asylum in the UK. The service not only meets an urgent need but does so with a high level of effectiveness, making it a valuable project and a prudent use of resources. The addition of RAB to Hope's provision has enhanced the overall Hope service by providing a rapid response mechanism, which complements and strengthens its other housing provision by ensuring that clients can be housed in the short term while the necessary assessment for allocation of longer-term housing is undertaken. This dual approach ensures that both immediate and longer-term housing needs are addressed efficiently, reinforcing the quality and impact of Hope's work.

Hope's focus on clients with a prospective 'route out' of destitution via progress with an asylum claim ensures that the charity's limited resources are used strategically, maximising the chances of successful outcomes, such as obtaining refugee status or leave to remain. This approach not only provides stability and dignity to those it serves but also sets an example of good practice for funders and other service providers that can help to inform the expansion of similar services. In conclusion, the Hope Projects, through its RAB service, demonstrates a robust and well-implemented model that other agencies could look to replicate, reinforcing its status as a valuable and effective initiative in the broader context of asylum support.

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