DignityFlow: Mobile Hygiene & Housing Integration

Deep Innovation Report

Executive Summary

DignityFlow coordinates mobile hygiene hubs with transitional housing pathways to restore personal dignity and support social reintegration in BCP.

By linking local charities, volunteer networks, and housing providers, this initiative builds a visible, practical bridge from crisis to stability.

The Better Everyday

What if personal care and clean clothes became the foundational starting point for rebuilding lives on the coast?

• The participant's idea, DignityFlow, is an integrated service model that coordinates mobile hygiene hubs providing hot showers, laundry facilities, and waste disposal with local transitional housing and support services. Inspired by the sketch showing a bright sun and the liberating power of cleanliness, this service acts as a physical and psychological gateway designed to transition unhoused individuals from basic dignity to stable, permanent housing.

• Imagine a cold November morning in Boscombe where an unhoused resident steps into a clean, heated mobile unit to wash their clothes and enjoy a hot shower in absolute privacy. After dressing in fresh clothes, they do not simply return to the street, but instead sit down with an advisor inside the unit who checks real-time shelter capacity and registers them for a warm room tonight. This seamless handoff ensures that the immediate physical relief of being clean is instantly connected to long-term stability.

• The current approach relies on fragmented services where physical hygiene facilities are geographically separated from housing advice offices, requiring individuals in crisis to navigate complex journeys across different neighbourhoods while carrying all their belongings. This workaround falls short because the immediate physical exhaustion, coupled with the social stigma of being unkempt, makes it incredibly difficult to access public buildings, attend appointments, or build trust with outreach staff.

• By proving that immediate personal dignity unlocks future social stability, this service could shift expectations for all emergency support across BCP, proving that practical care must precede administrative processing. Other local services and community centres might begin to integrate laundry and shower facilities as standard components of their public offerings, transforming how the region designs supportive social infrastructure.

Who It Could Matter To

Revisiting basic physical needs can build trust with those who have felt most excluded from local support systems.

The Isolated Rough Sleeper

• This person has slept rough near Bournemouth town centre for several years, feeling increasingly disconnected and self-conscious.

• They would encounter the mobile hygiene unit on a freezing weekday morning when their sleeping bag is damp and they need warmth.

• The benefit is a safe, non-judgmental space to clean up, restoring their confidence to talk with housing advisors.

The Boscombe Shopkeeper

• This local business owner operates an independent retail shop in Boscombe and worries about the visibility of street homelessness.

• They notice the mobile unit parking on their street on a predictable weekly schedule, keeping the immediate area clean.

• The benefit is a more welcoming trading environment and peace of mind that vulnerable individuals are receiving active care.

The Housing Outreach Worker

• This outreach professional works for a local charity but struggles to maintain consistent contact with transient clients.

• They use the coordination platform to meet clients at scheduled hygiene stops when they are relaxed and clean.

• The benefit is a reliable, high-trust meeting point that increases the success rate of housing assessments.

What This Could Change for BCP

Aligning basic hygiene with housing support can transform the visibility and effectiveness of social care in coastal communities.

• The coastal setting of BCP offers a strong opportunity to utilize empty town centre parking spaces and existing utility hookups during the quieter winter season when seasonal tourism drops. This geographic flexibility allows the units to move dynamically between Bournemouth town centre, Boscombe, and Poole Quay, adapting to seasonal shifts in the unhoused population.

• The direct effect would be a measurable decrease in rough sleeping by providing a clear, dignified pathway from a warm shower to an open-door shelter. Local town centres would become more inclusive and supportive, directly aligning with BCP Council's stated ambition for sustainable and inclusive regeneration that supports year-round economic growth.

• A wider ripple effect could see local digital and creative professionals from the Silicon South network volunteering to build and refine the DignityFlow scheduling and coordination app. This collaboration could lead to BCP becoming a national leader in tech-enabled social care, demonstrating how digital tools can optimize the delivery of physical support services.

• The trade-off involves balancing the placement of these units to ensure they are highly accessible to those in need without creating friction with nearby businesses concerned about loitering. Resolving this requires transparent, community-led agreements and clear, visible timetables to manage expectations and maintain local goodwill across each neighbourhood.

Who Must Connect

Bringing together grassroots hospitality, digital coordinators, and housing providers creates a seamless safety net.

• A local homelessness charity could act as the lead operator, partnering with a commercial vehicle specialist to manage and service the mobile hygiene units. The charity brings deep trust and outreach expertise, while the transport partner ensures the custom vehicles remain safe, clean, and mechanically sound.

• Unhoused individuals and former service users would actively shape decisions by joining a steering group to design the layout of the mobile units and the scheduling process. Their lived experience ensures the facilities feel safe, private, and respectful of personal boundaries.

• BCP Council's estates team would serve as the key enabler, providing the necessary permissions and access to power and water hookups in council-owned car parks. This arrangement allows the mobile units to operate legally and sustainably without relying on expensive, noisy portable generators.

• A consortium of local businesses and regional housing associations could fund the ongoing operational costs, recognizing the shared benefit of cleaner, safer town centres and more stable housing placements. They would fund the service through a combination of social responsibility grants and direct service level agreements.

• The missing link is the connection between the mobile hygiene team and local private rental landlords, which is currently non-existent but essential for securing long-term housing. A dedicated liaison officer from the housing association would need to make the first move to build trust and negotiate flexible leasing terms for program graduates.

Why This Fails

Even the most compassionate services will falter if they lack mechanical reliability, trust, or a clear pathway forward.

• **Volunteer fatigue** occurs when the intense physical and emotional demands of running the hygiene units rely too heavily on unpaid workers, leading to rapid burnout and cancelled shifts. The early warning sign would be a sudden increase in late schedule changes or units failing to deploy due to a lack of staff.

• **Dead-end showers** happens if the hygiene units operate successfully but the promised housing placements and support services are consistently full, leaving users clean but still stranded on the street. The early warning sign would be a drop-off in repeat visits and growing frustration among users who feel the 'open doors' promise is empty.

• **Site exclusion** could occur if local complaints about the presence of the mobile units lead to them being pushed out of accessible town centre locations to isolated industrial estates. The early warning sign would be a sharp decline in daily user numbers and an increase in missed appointments as the units become too difficult to reach on foot.

One Experiment to Start

Testing the connection between hygiene and housing on a small scale can prove the concept before investing in custom vehicles.

• The single most important uncertainty is whether a dignified hygiene experience actually increases a person's willingness to engage with housing services, or if they simply use the facilities and leave. If this core assumption is wrong, investing in expensive mobile units and custom software will not solve the underlying housing challenge.

• To test this, run a two-weekend pilot using a rented, stationary shower trailer parked in a discreet, council-approved lot near Boscombe, staffed by outreach workers who offer housing assessments on-site. Users would receive a clean towel, hot water, and a warm drink, followed by a quiet, private conversation about their housing needs.

• Keep going if a high proportion of shower users agree to begin a housing assessment and actively return for a follow-up discussion. Stop or rethink if users show high interest in the showers but consistently refuse to speak with the outreach staff, indicating that the transition pathway feels too pressured or untrustworthy.

• **Next step:** A local homelessness charity director could contact BCP Council's licensing department within the next 90 days to secure temporary permits and utility access for a short-term portable shower trial.