

## **PSI WORKING GROUP ON HOMELESSNESS**

### **EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

#### **Includes:**

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#### **1. Inter-agency working**

**1.1 Bolton Council's** Inter-Agency Forum is a cross-sector partnership in which a range of agencies works together to tackle homelessness. Health, police, probation, employment services and a number of voluntary agencies are involved. Strong links have been developed with prisons to make accommodation arrangements before release, and a mental health discharge project is now being set up.

**1.2 Leicester City Council** has developed particularly strong relationships with health services, including a dedicated doctor service for homeless people and specialist psychiatric support for children and adolescents who have experienced homelessness.

**1.3 Leicester's** homelessness partnership has also developed a framework of meetings to deliver a joined-up approach to both strategic and operational issues. These include: a group that looks at strategic and city-wide issues; a commissioning group that considers service procurement; and a 'managers and frontline' group, which meets on a regular basis to discuss more complex cases that require multi-agency input. Joint protocols have been developed, including

a protocol with social services, which aims to ensure that care leavers are accepted as statutorily homeless and have a support package assessment. There is an agreement between housing and social services that no family is evicted for antisocial behaviour or rent arrears without an opportunity for positive intervention by social services; and a protocol with the probation service and the police for re-housing high-risk offenders. The Council also part-funds two resettlement workers based within the probation service.

**1.4 Rochdale MBC** has developed several successful services based on working in partnership. The Joint Assessment Criteria is a joint Homelessness/Social Services approach to homeless 16/17 year olds, addressing the issues for young people by supporting, advising and when appropriate intervening to prevent homelessness. The Personal Medical Service is a partnership between health services, the voluntary sector and homelessness services. Health Services for homeless people are delivered on a surgery basis from two Day Centres, the Emergency Direct Access Accommodation and a town centre surgery.

**1.5 Harrow Council** has introduced the Sanctuary Scheme, a multi-agency partnership to provide support and security for women experiencing domestic violence, but who wish to remain in their home. This scheme has seen the Council working with the police, Women's Aid, the Women's Centre and private security firms to enable women who have suffered domestic violence to remain in their homes. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Office have commended the scheme.

## **2. Prevention: Advice and information**

**2.1 Monitoring the effectiveness of advice: Kingston-upon-Thames** has a private sector housing advice service, which is separate from its homelessness service. Largely reliant on a small number of staff, the service keeps detailed records of advice and monitors the outcomes of its actions where possible. The council managed to prevent homelessness for 147 households in 2000/01 and 157 households in 2001/02.

**2.2 Camden Borough Council** has also focused on information and advice in the

prevention of homelessness, tracking cases and identifying numbers of cases prevented and delayed as a result of its intervention. The Council has an in-house advice service for private sector tenants and uses a range of performance indicators to monitor outcomes. The Borough aims to prevent 300 cases of homelessness a year and to delay homelessness in a further 250 cases. It also aims to assist clients to access funds to prevent future homelessness and has an annual 'income generation' target of £250,000: this is achieved by advocacy for clients on HB issues, accessing grants from charities and liaising with landlords to reduce rent levels or retrieve deposits. In the financial year 2001/02, the two council advice centres raised £322,645 from compensation, rent saved, benefits, charity money and deposits gained for their clients.

**2.3 Ensuring access to advice:** Camden's *Homelessness Review* identified the need for an information strategy as part of the Council's *Homelessness Strategy*, to ensure the widest possible access to information about homelessness services.

**2.4 Harrow Council** provides every homeless applicant with a Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention Package, regardless of whether they are accepted as statutorily homeless.

### **3. Prevention: Intervention**

**3.1 Finding accommodation, and preventing loss of accommodation:** Colchester Borough Council has implemented schemes for finding accommodation in the private rented sector and help for people with mortgage and rent arrears. Homelessness is prevented wherever possible by early intervention, including landlord and family mediation; help with rent deposits; and advice on housing rights.

**3.2 Harrow Council** has appointed an outreach prevention officer, who aims to prevent homelessness in the private rented sector by mediating between landlords and tenants. The Council also offers help for single homeless people via a multi-agency weekly advice session in Harrow, where people can receive expert guidance on their options.

- 3.3 Rochdale Borough Council's** approach to prevention includes advice and advocacy on housing related issues, for example negotiating with landlords or building societies, pursuing back dated Housing Benefit or low-level debt advice. A range of resettlement support is available for families, single people, refugees and people who present with more challenging behaviour. The Council works with Shelter's Inclusion Project, which deals with households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as a result of antisocial behaviour.
- 3.4 Mediation: Harrow** has piloted a Family Mediation Service in partnership with Relate, to help clients find solutions and resolve differences so they can stay with relatives/friends or seek alternative accommodation solutions.
- 3.5** Over a four-year period, the **Dundee Families Project** worked with 126 households whose antisocial behaviour included conflict with neighbours and damage to property. The Audit Commission reported that: "Intensive support was provided for a 9-12 month period or longer. Services included counselling, family support and group work. The scheme involved three components: core accommodation for four families with staff on site; support for dispersed tenancies; and preventative outreach to families in their existing homes. Most clients had low incomes and were headed by a lone parent. Many had both housing difficulties and serious social problems, including difficulties with childcare and control, physical and mental health problems, and drug or alcohol misuse. Information on closed cases indicated that most families had fewer housing problems following involvement, though many still had serious childcare problems. While the costs and benefits of the service were not easy to quantify, some long-term savings were achieved by avoiding eviction, homelessness administration and re-housing costs, and by preventing the need for children to be placed in residential or foster care."
- 3.6 Portsmouth City Council** leases a number of council flats to a local voluntary agency, and offers them on license to people needing support, including those with issues around antisocial behaviour. The support is a condition of the licence and is paid for by Transitional Housing Benefit. If the occupants reach the stage where the agency agrees that they can successfully maintain a

tenancy, the licence turns to a tenancy and the occupants stay in the property, which is then replaced by another one for the scheme. The same agency also offers support to homeless families as a substitute for bed and breakfast accommodation, though these families are expected to move to another property when one becomes available.

#### **4. Finding Accommodation**

**4.1 Harrow Council** pioneered the London Authorities West and North Freshstart Scheme, which provides support to those wishing to move out of London to an identified property in a low demand area. The scheme was rolled out across London and subsequently developed into a national pilot mobility scheme, with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

**4.2 Harrow** also introduced the Finders Fee scheme, which provides financial premiums to landlords as an alternative to a rent deposit, to enable clients to seek their own alternative accommodation in the private rented sector.

**4.3 Kingston upon Thames** has also introduced new means of obtaining private sector accommodation. The Audit Commission reported: “The Council has historically had problems accessing private rented sector stock due to the cost, delays in HB payments and competition from students. However, staff have improved relationships with landlords and have developed a tenant finder service (TFS), using private sector accommodation as an alternative to B&B for applicants for whom a duty is accepted. Under the TFS, accommodation is provided for a year on a renewable basis until people are re-housed – the wait for social housing can be two years. Landlords are offered a month’s rent in advance and a deposit; this money is effectively loaned to the household, which is expected to contribute towards payments; to ensure affordability, properties are let at rents equal to the eligible rent for HB. With changes in the market, the service has successfully recruited enough landlords to provide 90 active tenancies. The council is now extending the scheme to accommodate households who are threatened with homelessness, are in priority need and not intentionally homeless, but who do not wish to apply to the council for

housing.”

- 4.4** In the **Borough of Telford and Wrekin**, renovation grants are used to help landlords to carry out repairs and improvements to older properties (including installing new windows or central heating) so that they can be leased to the council as temporary accommodation. This has enabled the council to find TA in smaller centres and the more rural areas of the council, and means that homeless households can be housed closer to support networks while waiting for permanent offers.

## **5. Models of accommodation**

- 5.1 Supported lodging schemes** enable vulnerable or marginalized young people to rent rooms in a household where support is provided by both the housing provider and a floating support worker. Householders agree to offer advice and emotional support and generally to help the young person to acquire independent living skills; the support worker also maintains contact with the young person. The Young Persons’ Project’s submission to the Social Development Committee in 2002 emphasised that this model of support is viable in both urban and rural settings, and requires low capital costs. However, it is also important that there is a clear strategy and planned provision, a wide spectrum of homelessness services available, and that the scheme is not used as an emergency response.

- 5.2 Foyers** offer accommodation for young people aged 17 to 25 who are in housing need and are committed to developing their training, education and employment opportunities. Based on established practice in Europe, Foyers were first set up in Britain in the early 1990s. There are currently 120 in operation across the UK, including 4 in Northern Ireland.

## **6. Access in rural areas**

- 6.1 Herefordshire District Council** is a sparsely populated rural district council that has overcome some of the difficulties of operating in this context by providing services for homeless people at three area offices, and at two offices

owned by a Housing Association on an outreach/surgery basis.

- 6.2 West Berkshire District Council** is also mainly rural, and has experienced difficulties in providing advice across the whole area. To address this, surgery advice sessions are carried out on market day in one town, and the council makes good use of libraries to give advice and to direct people to information in a range of leaflets. The Community Learning and Information Vehicle (CLIVE), established in partnership with education, employment and information services, visits a range of villages and towns over a three weekly cycle; and the council's website includes information about the housing register, homelessness and the points scheme.

## **7. Education**

- 7.1 Shelter's Homework project** has produced packs that deal with homelessness and housing, for use in primary and post-primary schools. The post-primary pack provides information and resources for Key Stage 3 and 4 teachers, which can be used in Citizenship and Personal Development syllabi.
- 7.2 The Simon Community NI** has produced a CD-ROM resource, **outhouse**, which is designed for use within the Northern Ireland curriculum. It aims to develop the basic life skills young people need to become independent, and has been issued free of charge to every post-primary school and many youth clubs and community groups across Northern Ireland. Simon also operates a peer education group, **outspoken**, in which young people who have experienced homelessness lead interactive workshops on homelessness issues and developing independent life skills.

## **8. Sources**

- 8.1** The above examples were obtained from the relevant council websites, Simon Community NI website, Shelter's *Homelessness Pages*, the *Report of the Advisory Panel on Beacon Councils* (March 2003), and the Audit Commission's report, *Homelessness: Responding to the New Agenda* (2003).