NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY PANEL 3 – HOMELESSNESS

BRIEFING NOTE: DESKTOP RESEARCH – BEST PRACTICE

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   At its inaugural meeting, Scrutiny Panel 3 (Homelessness) agreed that it would receive details of best practice initiatives regarding homelessness prevention.

1.2   Detailed below are some examples.

2   SHELTER - Homelessness: Early Identification and Prevention - A Good Practice Guide (2007)

2.1   SHELTER reports that its guide aims to assist local authorities and local agencies in their ability to identify people who are at risk of becoming homeless. The guide highlights current good practice examples of how to identify these vulnerable groups and individuals, and offer support to prevent homelessness occurring.

2.2   It is reported in the Guide that there are a number of groups that research, over many years, has identified as being at a greater risk of homelessness than the general population. These include:

- Young people
- Care leavers
- Ex-offenders
- People with mental health problems
- Refugees
- Gypsies and Travellers (housed and on sites)
- People with drug or alcohol addictions
- People leaving hospital
- Ex-members of the Armed Forces

2.3   Case studies are provided in the Guide, an example below:

'Mrs A came to me in tears one day because she had received an eviction notice. She could neither read nor write properly, but felt too ashamed to tell the staff at the housing office. They had sent her letters about her arrears (which were due to a misunderstanding over Housing Benefit), but she couldn't understand them. She happened to have invited a neighbour in for a cup of tea on the day she got the eviction notice, and the neighbour read it to her. To be fair to them, the housing staff couldn't have been more helpful when they understood the problem, but it caused a lot of trouble, and Mrs A nearly lost her home. She's a widow with no close family and health problems, and I just think that when she carried on not replying to letters they could have sent someone out to see her.'

Voluntary agency advice worker – Shelter interview.

2.4 The Guide also provides details of good practice undertaken by Local Authorities, example as extracted from the Guide below:

Good practice example:
Your Homes Newcastle

Newcastle City Council (NCC) has developed a Protocol for Preventing Repeat Homelessness and Evictions, which is an agreement between the Strategic Housing Service, social services and Your Homes Newcastle (YHN), who manage council homes on behalf of NCC.

The protocol enables staff at YHN to identify vulnerable tenants prior to the start of a tenancy. It sets out a procedure for assessing individual housing and support needs, and for working with vulnerable tenants and the relevant external support agencies to promote tenancy sustainment. The protocol illustrates the role each agency has in supporting vulnerable tenants and ways in which joint working can be implemented if problems occur.

The procedure is divided into three sections:

- part one – action to be taken prior to the start of the tenancy

- part two – action to be taken during the tenancy

- part three – action to prevent eviction and the loss of accommodation.

The first step in part one of the procedure, the main element concerning prevention, involves identifying those applicants who may be vulnerable or at risk of homelessness. The protocol identifies the following groups of potentially vulnerable people:

- households that the NCC has accepted a full duty to house as homeless in the previous two years

- people with a social worker, community psychiatric nurse, mental health worker or drug/alcohol support worker

- people with a housing support worker or who are leaving housing funded by Supporting People

- individuals with a probation officer or Youth Offending Team worker

- refugees

- people leaving hospital, prison, care or the armed forces

- people with known drug or alcohol problems

- people whose learning difficulties or physical or sensory impairment make them vulnerable

- older people

- anyone subject to multi-agency public protection arrangements.

During step one, support workers who are already involved with the individual are contacted for information that will assist in developing a support plan. Any existing housing or support plans should be shared. Where an individual is not involved with an external agency, and it is believed that additional support might be required, their case will be referred to the in-house advice and support team.

Where there are concerns about a person's ability to maintain a tenancy, step two of the procedure is enacted. This means arranging a case meeting with the applicant, agencies involved with the applicant and other agencies who may be able to provide information and support. A support plan is created and an agreement put in place to determine the responsibilities of each agency, the timescale for support and a mechanism for maintaining contact.

The good practice principles set out in this protocol enable YHN staff to conduct a thorough assessment of individual needs and identify vulnerability prior to the tenancy commencing, minimising the chances of the tenancy breaking down. The next stage is to ensure that it is embedded in all practice areas and monitoring procedures. The protocol will be included in the Council's new allocations policy and management information system.

'The protocol has been designed to provide longer term, more meaningful homelessness prevention. It aims to foster better joint working within the local authority and create much needed organisational culture change.'

Neil Munslow, Housing Services Manager, NCC.

Good practice example: West Berkshire Vulnerable People Protocol

West Berkshire Council's Vulnerable People Protocol (VPP) is a proactive approach to the identification, assessment and support of people who are, or who may become, vulnerable to losing their tenancies because of unmet support needs. It is a multi-agency protocol led by Sovereign Housing Association, West Berkshire Council (housing operations, social services and Housing Benefit teams) and Two Saints Housing Association.

The protocol and its associated training package for staff and service users presents tools and available services and resources in West Berkshire to ensure that vulnerable people receive timely information, advice and support. It uses a broad definition of vulnerability, recognising that it can occur at different stages in life, whether episodic and recurring, or ongoing and increasing over time. Indicators, or points at which vulnerability can occur, are listed as being:

- hospitalisation and periods following discharge from hospital or other institutional care
- periods of sustained illness at home
- change from supported accommodation to independent living
- evidence of neighbour harassment or abuse towards the individual or household
- evidence of antisocial behaviour by the individual or household
- rent arrears or other debt problems
- repeat homelessness
- during and following substance abuse.

The VPP staff training pack takes these indicators further by including, for example, episodes of stress or mental ill health, chaotic lifestyles, loss of income and bereavement as points of vulnerability. The protocol therefore requires that consideration should be given to potential vulnerability at all points of contact with residents, and potential residents, within the district. These points of contact include:

- applications for housing
- home visits
- ad hoc visits, eg because of rent arrears
- programmes of tenancy visits/audits
- supported move to new housing
- social/medical panels
- key life-cycle events such as bereavement or relationship breakdown
- issue of notice of eviction.

The training pack has been designed to enable frontline staff to understand potential vulnerability and learn how to respond to it, make an assessment, and review, evaluate and track the VPP. Once vulnerability and support needs have been identified, support may be provided by any agency involved, and will be determined by the pre-tenancy meeting, other contact between the partner agencies, or through a case conference.

'The key to preventing homelessness is timely information and support. The training for professionals should provide frontline staff with a range of skills, tools and information to this end.'

Jon Cox, Two Saints Housing Association.

Good practice example: housing worker, Plymouth Children's Service

The development of a specific homelessness prevention role, through the introduction of a housing worker within the Children's Service in Plymouth, is based upon a similar model of early identification and homelessness prevention in Colchester.

The primary role of the housing worker will be to pick up housing casework from social workers and social work assistants who are concerned about the families with whom they are working, and intervene as early as possible.

The introduction of a housing worker within social services aims to generate greater knowledge and understanding of the roles of both social services and the housing department, and improve their communication with each other. An increased awareness among social workers of housing-related issues will ensure that timely referrals can be made to the housing worker, who will:

- refer families to the housing officer
- provide money and budgeting advice to families
- maximise income through benefits advice
- work with the housing officer to resolve issues relating to rent arrears
- assess family support needs
- assist with applications for private housing.

By introducing this specific role it is hoped that social workers, housing officers and the housing worker can work together to identify problems at the earliest opportunity. Early intervention (ie before housing or financial problems become too serious) will enable the housing worker to work effectively and efficiently with the Council's housing advisers, outreach workers, Welfare Benefits advisers, housing officers, Housing Benefit team and floating support staff to resolve problems, prevent family breakdown and homelessness, and promote tenancy sustainment through continuity of support.

Good practice example: tenancy tracker, Coast and Country Housing

Coast and Country Housing (C&CH) are able to provide an in-house Housing Benefit claim verification service. While advisers provide prospective tenants with assistance and support, tenants' benefit claims are able to be verified and dealt with within the organisation, making the process quicker and easier for the tenants. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council covers a wide geographical area, which can be a barrier to people on low incomes attempting to make benefit claims. Thus the provision of local in-house Housing Benefit services removes some of the barriers that people face in making their claims.

All new tenancies are monitored through the tenancy tracker procedure. The purpose of this procedure is to provide effective management of the rent accounts of new tenants up to the first 13 weeks. This ensures that:

- new tenants have a means of paying rent that is suitable to their needs and circumstances
- tenants who are experiencing difficulties are referred to advice and support agencies and floating support services where this is appropriate
- Housing Benefit claims have been processed correctly and benefit is paid, and
- rent payments are being made.

Where difficulties with a Housing Benefit claim occur, the tenancy tracker procedure highlights this and provides a system for joint working between the account's advisers and housing advisers. C&CH has a small team that deals with benefit revisions and appeals, and provides representation and support for clients at independent appeal tribunals.

Good practice example: 'fix it' fund

Bournemouth Borough Council set up this fund in 2003. It has been used at the discretion of housing officers as a tool to prevent homelessness by giving a 'one-off' payment to the tenant. Examples include:

- paying off arrears where it is not deemed to be the tenant's fault that they are in financial trouble, and where it would prove substantially more expensive to 'pick up' a family as homeless after eviction

- paying off damage costs demanded by a landlord where it is deemed not to be the tenant's fault

- paying landlords a proportion of 'rent in advance' payments, where it is deemed that the tenant cannot access sufficient funds elsewhere.

Good practice example: Southern Focus Trust Housing Advice Centre

Southern Focus Trust Housing Advice Centre (SFTHAC) provides independent advice on housing, benefits and debt in the Portsmouth Area. The centre has a Community Legal Service quality mark.

Portsmouth City Council has been concerned about the number of repeat homelessness cases they have dealt with from the private sector. In response they have funded 24 hours of casework per week from SFTHAC for private sector tenants and owner-occupiers who are at risk of eviction and homelessness, usually as a result of rent or mortgage arrears. SFTHAC provides a holistic service that includes benefits and debt counselling, as well as help with housing.

The Council has exclusive referral rights to four appointments per week, and by referring directly to SFTHAC it can be sure the service user is getting the appropriate assistance. SFTHAC keeps the Council informed of the progress in each case. It refers the client back to the Council if it is not possible to keep the client's home, which helps both the client and the Council ensure that a homelessness application is carried out quickly and efficiently.

'[SFTHAC] knew my rights and managed to help me quickly.'
Service user – Shelter questionnaire.

'[Without SFTHAC] I would have been more stressed, and would not have known what to do.'
Service user – Shelter questionnaire.

Good practice example: Bournemouth Housing Advice Service

Bournemouth Housing Advice Service (BHAS) was established in 2001. The service is delivered by Shelter in partnership with Bournemouth Borough Council and Bournemouth Housing Forum. The Council funds two workers who concentrate on preventative advice and helping people to keep their home. Referrals come from a variety of different sources – advice agencies, the local authority, friends and family, and self-referrals. The most common problems that people present with are rent arrears, Housing Benefit problems, disrepair and possession proceedings.

In 2003, the service launched the BHAS Network to ensure that service users can access appropriate advice from other agencies. Sixty-eight member agencies are listed in the BHAS Network Directory, which contains information and contact details about each member. Members include organisations such as Connexions and various support agencies. This directory is distributed to all network members to ensure that each member agency has a detailed knowledge of the services offered by other agencies and can initiate effective referrals.

All members are invited to attend wider network meetings. These meetings provide an opportunity to share successes and address the challenges that agencies dealing with housing advice face. The network aims to ensure that, regardless of which agency a service user approaches, they are given the right information or referred on to the right agency. All agencies in the network display a BHAS logo to highlight that housing advice is available.

BHAS also provides training sessions to network members. These sessions are well attended and cover a variety of topics, including homelessness and the rights of vulnerable people and helping with claims for Housing Benefit. The training helps member organisations to provide better direct advice and advocacy, and also to know when it is appropriate to make a referral.

'Last year 67 per cent of our clients were homeless or likely to become homeless within 28 days. This year the figure has reduced to 45 per cent, which means that we are more effective at reducing homelessness. This seems to be because more people know about our service, and people with housing issues are able to access our service at an earlier stage.'
Bournemouth Housing Advice Service Review, 2005.

'We have attended various training days and all have been very relevant to our work and given us more confidence when dealing with housing enquiries.'
Network member.

Good practice example: advice centre for black and minority ethnic groups, Shelter Housing Advice and Support Centre, Stratford, London

This project aims to improve access to housing advice for black and ethnic minority groups by working with local communities. It is targeted at people living in the London Boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney.

The Shelter project ensures that advice is available in locations such as community centres, as well as at the project base in Stratford. The service is heavily advertised through the local press and community organisations, as well as by services such as Connexions. Delivering advice in the community not only makes it easier to access, but also increases people's trust and confidence in the services being offered. The project employs multi-lingual housing advisers and can access a translation service for languages not offered directly.

The project offers drop-in appointments at the centre in Stratford, as well as providing outreach advice at locations such as community centres where there are crèches and other support services.

The aim of the project is that it will reach individuals from black and other minority ethnic groups long before they are threatened with homelessness. By providing advice that is timely, independent and culturally sensitive, the project hopes to make it easier for individuals to find and keep a decent home.

Good practice example: St Basils

St Basils is a Birmingham-based organisation that offers a range of housing and support to local young people. One of its initiatives is the Schools Training and Mentoring Project (STaMP). As part of the project, sessions giving information about housing and homelessness from a local perspective are run in local secondary schools and other youth work settings. They are interactive and encourage young people to discuss issues and ask questions. Each session is co-facilitated by a peer educator. The peer educators are young people aged 16 to 25, mainly ex-service users of St Basils. They have experience of homelessness and are able to give a real-life account of their knowledge of housing need.

As the project has developed, it has been possible to put into place a peer-mentoring service. The mentors are peer educators who have become interested in extending their role. They are trained to an approved standard by St Basils, and offer one-to-one support to those young people who are judged to be most at risk from leaving home in an unplanned way. As well as offering holistic support around issues such as mental health, sexual health and family relationships, they can offer informed advice about housing and homelessness issues. If necessary, they can refer families or individuals to St Basils' counselling, family mediation or housing advice services. Each mentor supports one or two service users, and a mentoring worker supports the mentors.

If a peer mentor feels that more specific housing advice or advocacy is needed, they can refer the individual to St Basils Links Housing Advice Service. This provides age-specific advice to young people in the Birmingham area and employs knowledgeable workers who are aware of the specific needs of their client group. The peer-mentoring scheme provides a bridge to the advice service, ensuring that some of the most hard-to-reach young people are given effective support.

Good practice example: Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council Homelessness Prevention Floating Support Service

This service is funded through Supporting People and is run by the Regeneration, Housing and Neighbourhoods Department. The scheme is cross tenure, providing services for homeowners and private tenants, as well as people with RSLs. A team of three people provides advice and support for up to 30 individuals and families who are seen as being vulnerable to homelessness. The team has a rolling programme, so as a particular case ends it is able to give more in-depth support to new cases. Most tenants use the service for six months, but some use it for up to 18 months. Help offered includes:

- liaising with landlords
- signposting and assisting with debt-counselling and budgeting skills
- liaising with mortgage companies, banks, Housing Benefit and the benefits agency in order to optimise income
- facilitating dispute resolution and mediation
- completing benefit forms
- liaising with social services
- resettlement activities.

Referrals come mainly from the housing needs department, but they also come from a variety of other sources: mental health teams, local housing associations, and the local criminal justice and learning disabilities teams are just a few examples. The service is available to households who are at risk of homelessness or who simply need some extra support, as well as those who have recently been homeless. The team ensures that their work is well publicised among local agencies so that appropriate referrals can be made. They also refer onto other agencies when they feel that they do not have the expertise needed, or that help from another source would be beneficial.

Once a referral has been made, a support worker will visit the household to discuss the level of support needed. If the individual or family is accepted onto the scheme, a tailor-made support plan will be drawn up. The plan is reviewed on a regular basis to take account of changing needs.

'If the client is unfamiliar with the area we would ... get them maps, ... onto a doctors list, ... a dentist, help them to apply to schools ... and absolutely anything else that could be needed.'

Support worker.

**Good practice example:
Julian Housing Support**

Julian Housing Support (JHS) is a supported housing charity based in Norfolk that works to prevent homelessness by providing services for people with mental health problems. It is jointly funded by Supporting People and health and social services. JHS works in partnership with Norfolk Social Services, Norfolk Primary Care Trust and the major housing providers in the county. It is through this partnership approach that JHS has been able to develop a wide range of housing choices and options for support.

JHS are alerted to individuals who are at risk of homelessness by a range of statutory and voluntary services. Referrals are accepted from mental health social workers, community mental health teams, primary care link workers and, in some circumstances, housing providers. The early identification and thorough assessment of housing-related problems and support needs, combined with multi-agency working, ensures that homelessness can be prevented long before people need to make a homelessness application.

JHS services include the following.

- A floating support service in every district and for people in any tenure. Support can be short- or long-term, and more or less intensive, depending upon a person's needs.

- A Hospital Housing Link scheme (attached to every psychiatric acute ward across the county), which provides housing and benefits advice, supporting over 400 people per year. Housing Link workers visit inpatients with housing problems and patients are supported either to keep their existing homes or to find alternative suitable accommodation before they are discharged from hospital.

- An outreach service supporting people in their own homes. Outreach workers attend regular meetings with mental health workers and are involved in the care-planning process to decide on the housing and health assistance that their clients need.

- An outreach service that is a flexible model of care offered to people who find it hard to access services because of their mental health problems.

- A supported housing scheme and resettlement programme for clients who require additional support before moving onto independent living.

JHS has been described by organisations and service users as a dependable and responsive service that offers creative ways of helping people with mental health problems who are at risk of homelessness or inadequately housed. Their interventions have led to an increase in people's housing stability and an investment in their future. By helping to reduce some of the stresses related to maintaining a tenancy, deterioration in someone's mental health can be alleviated and loss of housing can be prevented.

'I got ill and had to give up work... I couldn't afford the mortgage... I wouldn't have known what to do [without JHS] and my home would have been repossessed.'
JHS service user.

Good practice example: Shelter Inclusion Project

The Shelter Inclusion Project was set up in 2002. The project was designed to provide an alternative model to enforcement policies and residential schemes. It was developed by Shelter and Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council. The project has three key objectives:

- to reduce antisocial behaviour
- to promote social inclusion and community stability
- to prevent eviction and provide a route back into settled housing.

The project works with families, couples and individuals, and its referral criteria require a 'history of antisocial behaviour'. Once people have been referred to the project they have access to a range of help and support, including:

- housing advice and advocacy
- help with benefits and money management
- support with addressing antisocial behaviour issues
- practical assistance, eg with decorating
- referral to other agencies
- parenting advice and support
- assistance with employment and training
- direct specialist work with children and young people.

Originally, many of the households referred to the project were subject to one or more enforcement actions linked to alleged antisocial behaviour. As work developed, cases started to be referred at an earlier stage. Initially, the majority of referrals came from the enforcement team at Rochdale Boroughwide Housing. Now more come from housing officers who refer before any enforcement action is taken.

Staff at the project feel it is much easier to work with early intervention cases because behaviour patterns are less entrenched and the situation has not reached a crisis point. In addition, because the antisocial behaviour is being picked up at an earlier stage, the community does not have to suffer the problem for as long as it might have done otherwise.

The Inclusion Project is now working with the Respect Task Force to deliver a Family Intervention Project. This project will work closely with eight to 10 families who are involved in high-level antisocial behaviour and are close to losing their homes. This means that the present project will be able to focus more closely on early intervention.

'[If it weren't for the Project] I think I'd still be where I was… as in debt wise… I don't think I'd have done as much as I have – I wouldn't have sorted my bills out... and would have ended up getting a load of fines and all that…'

Project user.

Good practice example: Newcastle City Council Hospital Discharge and Homelessness Prevention Protocol

The protocol was created by key agencies in Newcastle who work with people who might be homeless or at risk of homelessness and have been admitted to hospital. The Strategic Housing Service, which is part of the Regeneration Directorate, is leading on the development of the protocol. Its key aim is to ensure that all agencies coming into contact with people who are vulnerable to homelessness, or without accommodation on admission to hospital, help those people find appropriate housing and support before they leave hospital.

Certain key groups were identified as being at most risk of homelessness on discharge from hospital:

- people who were homeless prior to admission to hospital
- people who were in an institution, such as prison
- people staying in temporary accommodation
- people who have arrived in Newcastle with nowhere to stay
- people who had accommodation before admission to hospital but who either cannot or will not return to that accommodation
- people who have accommodation that will need to be adapted following their hospital treatment.

The protocol outlines key steps for all agencies to take to prevent homelessness. These are:

- action to be taken to prevent a patient from becoming homeless on discharge from hospital, and the process to be followed on admission

- seeking help from other agencies in finding accommodation and arranging support
- making information for patients and staff on display in hospital wards.

Within each step are the key questions that staff must ask all patients, the people and agencies that should be contacted, and what to do outside of office hours. Specific guidance is provided for dealing with particularly vulnerable people, including street homeless people, people with mental health problems, patients under 18 years of age, asylum seekers and refugees, and people with drugs and/or alcohol problems.

A housing resource pack and guidance on sharing information accompany the protocol. This pack outlines the role and contact details of each of the key agencies involved. It provides further information on where to get benefits advice and lists the homelessness contacts in the region. The pack also provides guidance on helping people to obtain settled accommodation.

The introduction of a clear set of guidelines for the assessment of all patients' accommodation needs on admission to hospital has obvious benefits for patients and hospital and housing staff.

'The development of the protocol through a working group has already helped... give people in the health service a better idea about who does what in the homelessness world.'

Sheila Spencer, Policy Officer, Newcastle Homelessness Prevention Project.

Good practice example: West Yorkshire Offender Housing Protocol

The West Yorkshire Offender Housing Protocol is based on a framework developed in Tyne and Wear – the Housing and Returning Prisoners Protocol (HARP). In West Yorkshire, all five local authorities (Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Leeds and Wakefield) have signed up to the protocol, which aims to provide a co-ordinated approach to the accommodation of offenders, those released from custody, and those under the supervision of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

It seeks to provide 'end-to-end' management of accommodation by addressing the housing needs of offenders at the following stages:

- before custody
- at sentencing
- on reception in prison
- during custody, and
- on release.

The protocol provides a pathway to resettlement. It identifies the key responsibilities of the different agencies within that pathway and their organisational responsibilities. The protocol clearly outlines the steps that need to be taken at each stage and by whom. It promotes effective communication at all levels and commitment from all partner agencies to joint working. It involves clear information-sharing policies and decision-making processes.

The protocol also seeks to address:

- local authorities' duties towards the prevention of homelessness
- prison and probation commitment to effective resettlement (encompassed within the NOMS National Reducing Re-offending Delivery Plan)
- how partner agencies contribute towards community safety objectives
- the contribution of RSLs and the voluntary sector in housing and supporting offenders.

Shelter has a cross-regional contract with the Prison Service to provide housing advice, increasing the links between offenders in custody and local housing and support providers. Effective partnerships across statutory, private and voluntary sector organisations are central to the protocol because the housing needs of prisoners can only be successfully met if services outside prison are fully engaged in the process.

This protocol acknowledges the links between accommodation and other support needs by integrating housing with other aspects of resettlement, including health, social networks, education and training. Housing is seen, therefore, as the foundation for other interventions and their effectiveness.

Good practice example: Bristol City Council Joint Protocol

This joint protocol outlines the statutory responsibilities of Bristol Social Services and Health (SS&H) and Neighbourhood and Housing Services (N&HS) in assessing and responding to the housing and support needs of young people who are:

- 'in need' or require protection
- due to leave or have already left care, and
- homeless or threatened with homelessness, vulnerable and have a priority need.

The protocol provides tools for assessment and action for both departments to take, promoting joint assessments and information sharing at all stages and defining timescales for actions. The protocol was widely promoted to staff from all sectors. It was launched in 2003 at a number of multi-agency roadshow events that involved SS&H, N&HS and representatives from the voluntary sector, youth housing and support providers.

The protocol and related workshops provided workers with the valuable opportunity to talk to each other, share their concerns and develop creative solutions to the housing problems faced by vulnerable young people.

This protocol worked well for a period of time; however, since its initial launch and promotion a number of changes have occurred. There has been a high turnover of staff in both the voluntary and statutory sectors, as well as structural changes within services in the area, which have led to difficulties in implementing the agreement. Bristol City Council has recognised these problems and will soon be leading on the revision, updating and promotion of a new version of the protocol.

'[The launch] brought various strands of social services, housing and the voluntary sector together in lively workshops… We hoped the joint assessment framework and child protection focus would drive us all (and our departments/organisations) to own the shared purpose that we could, after all, work together.'
Robin Spencer, NCH Bristol Housing Project.

> **Good practice example: a multi-agency protocol for young people, South Gloucestershire**
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> South Gloucestershire Council, Priority Youth Housing and Connexions have developed a protocol with other agencies to improve services for young vulnerable people who are homeless or in temporary accommodation. The framework has not been implemented yet; however the protocol is an ambitious one that outlines the roles, responsibilities and practices that should be undertaken by participating agencies in a variety of situations, so it should be useful for other agencies to look at.
>
> The underlying principles behind the protocol are based on the prevention of homelessness, where possible, and effective communication between agencies and the young people concerned. The protocol covers homelessness prevention, accommodation and support services for:
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> - homeless 16- and 17-year-olds and care leavers aged 16 to 21
> - young people aged 18 to 25 who are vulnerable or have complex needs
> - young people in supported housing or bed and breakfast accommodation
> - young people who are at risk of eviction from temporary accommodation, when there is a risk that the local authority will decide that it has discharged its duty.
>
> Key to the success of the protocol is a joint assessment process involving a new Youth Housing
>
> Social Worker (YHSW), the housing department and Priority Youth Housing. The YHSW takes on the initial liaison role with the housing department and support agencies, and assesses the potential for the young person to return home. Where this is possible, the YHSW will work towards a return home at an early stage.
>
> There is also flexibility in allocating personal advisers for care leavers – this can either be someone from social services or an independent personal adviser from one of the other participating agencies, depending on the circumstances and the young person's preference.
>
> The protocol includes guidance on how to make supported housing work and supporting young people in bed and breakfast accommodation. The guidance recommends visits in the first 24 hours, involving specialist workers as necessary, early warnings from accommodation providers if things are going wrong, and follow-up visits to talk to both the individual and the workers about the situation.
>
> There is also a procedure for intervening when young people are at risk of losing their temporary accommodation and their right to more secure housing from the Council. This involves early communications from the housing department to staff in other agencies when there are problems, and a multi-agency review of the case before the Council decides that they need to evict the individual. The spirit of the protocol, however, is to avoid this situation arising in the first place, by ensuring early communication between agencies and effective intervention when necessary.

2.5   A copy of the full document can be located:
http://england.shelter.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/193134/Homelessness_early_identification_prevention.pdf

3   Homeless Link – Transatlantic Practice Exchange (2014)

3.1   Homeless Link published a report in 2014 that details reports from 10 frontline professionals on an international exchange of knowledge and practice.

3.2   The report details that exchange took place between May and July 2014 with participants spending up to two weeks on placement with their hosts and other local organisations.

3.3   The report states that the nature of public services is changing and the perception of and the public value that they create is being challenged. Welfare Reform, funding changes, increased localism and changing demographics have produced significant challenges to the way things are done. The report goes on to state that the Transatlantic Practice Exchange was designed against this backdrop to provide a space for new thinking about the ways that we deliver services. In 2014 five front line

staff from England travelled to USA to learn about the different ways of delivering services to particular groups. The structure of the placements enabled participants to develop an understanding of the context in which these services operate, giving them a unique insight into how things can be done differently – and also why they are done differently.

3.4   The report goes on to state there are two overarching themes in the reports from the UK participants:

- The need for therapeutic interventions
- Challenging the short-term nature of support in the UK

3.5   The report comments that the USA has a serious homeless problem with a sizable system to address it. It has improved its approaches to homelessness and developed a number of effective practices, including:

- Permanent supportive housing
- Housing First
- Rapid re-housing
- Critical Time interventions
- Systems are data driven

3.6   It is reported that the exchange was extraordinarily productive, with a number of observations, including:

- The advantages of a more comprehensive set of social benefits in the UK. In the USA programs often have to piece together housing, services and income on a case-by-case basis.
- A greater focus on youth homelessness in the UK than in the USA.

3.7   Case studies detailed in the report include:

- Trauma-informed care (New York)
- Housing First for people with dual diagnosis (Seattle)
- Permanent Supporting Housing (New York)
- Stabilisation: helping people come home for good (Boston)
- Permanent Supportive Housing for people over 50 (Boston)
- Hospital Discharge Strategies (Brighton, UK)
- Chronicle Excluded Adults: the MEAM Approach (Cambridge, UK)
- No Second Night Out (London, UK)
- Psychologically Informed Environments (London, UK)
- Youth Homelessness: Nightstops and Reconnect (London, UK)

3.8   A copy of the full report can be located:
http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Homeless%20Link%20-%20Transatlantic%20Practice%20Exchange%202014.pdf

4   DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT – MAKING EVERY CONTACT COUNT (2012)

4.1   It is reported that the aim of the report is to make sure every contact local agencies make with vulnerable people and families really count:

- Tackle troubled childhoods and adolescence – through interventions to turn around the lives of the most troubled families, and by promoting innovative approaches to youth homelessness

- Improve health – including improving outcomes for homeless people with dual drugs/alcohol and mental health needs

- Reduce involvement in crime – Support to Police and Crime Commissioners, improving offender access to private rented accommodation

- Improve skills, employment and financial advice – new housing demonstration projects heling claimants budget and manage rent payments

- Pioneer social funding for homelessness

4.2   The report details ten challenges for Local Authorities:

- adopt a corporate commitment to prevent homelessness which has buy in across all local authority services
- actively work in partnership with voluntary sector and other local partners to address support, education, employment and training needs
- offer a Housing Options prevention service, including written advice, to all clients
- adopt a *No Second Night Out* model or an effective local alternative
- have housing pathways agreed or in development with each key partner and client group that includes appropriate accommodation and support
- develop a suitable private rented sector offer for all client groups, including advice and support to both clients and landlords
- actively engage in preventing mortgage repossessions including through the Mortgage Rescue Scheme
- have a homelessness strategy which sets out a proactive approach to preventing homelessness and is reviewed annually so that it is responsive to emerging needs
- not place any young person aged 16 or 17 in Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- not place any families in Bed and Breakfast accommodation unless in an emergency and then for no longer than 6 weeks

4.3   A copy of the full report can be located:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7597/2200459.pdf

5 OTHER BEST PRACTICE GUIDES

5.1 There are a number of Best Practice Guides regarding homelessness preventative and assistance but these are over ten years old, therefore the links to such Guides are detailed below for the Scrutiny Panel's information:

SHELTER – Mediation for Young Homeless People (2004) https://england.shelter.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/40143/Mediation_for_Young_Homeless_People.pdf

G15 – Tackling Homelessness (2004) http://g15london.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/g15_homelessness_offer_full_report.pdf

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