

Homelessness Action Team

HAT Update

August 2007



This regular update aims to help those with a role in preventing or tackling homelessness by giving you news about the role of the team, examples of good practice, and information about new publications and forthcoming events. We hope that you will also want to use the update to inform others about what you are doing. You can send information to include to hatenquiries@housingcorp.gsx.gov.uk.

The HAT Team

The team was formed in January 2007. We have gradually brought in new members so we are now a team of six:

- Mark Meehan
- Madeleine Jeffery
- Dave Anteh
- Gerald Wild
- Martin Waddington
- Nick Sedgwick

We have been getting round introducing ourselves to as many partner organisations as we can. We have also been speaking at many events and meetings to raise awareness of homelessness issues and the Housing Corporation's Homelessness Strategy. If you have an event that you are planning and would like our input please let us know.

The team has been concentrating on visiting all the larger housing associations in London and working with the local authorities, given the homelessness pressures in the capital. The team has met all the G15 associations and all the local authorities.

The response to our visits has been very positive, with work underway across the G15 to develop action plans by the autumn which will show the range of work undertaken across the sector. Our work with key stakeholders supports our commitment to progress key issues around themes like housing need and temporary to permanent schemes.

The team is also starting to work with housing associations outside London, concentrating in the West Midlands, Leeds, Sheffield and Greater Manchester areas whilst also covering some other areas where there are homelessness pressures.

It is clear that there can be the need for associations to review where they can have the greatest impact on homelessness and to actively engage with those local authorities in reviewing their homelessness strategies. Analysis of the data available through CORE, the RSR and P1Es can provide a valuable picture of what is happening locally.

Homelessness Action Plans

The Housing Corporation's Homelessness Strategy asks that all associations should review their services and produce a homelessness action plan. Some associations have already adopted action plans and many more are working on their plans. We feel that the following sections should be included in action plans:

- Corporate commitments,
- Key data showing trends over the last three years and comparisons with regional averages,
- The current services you provide to prevent or tackle homelessness,
- Your nominated Homelessness Champion,
- SMART actions, and
- How the plan will be monitored and reported to the association's board.

Some associations are using the development of their action plan as an opportunity to highlight the range of ways in which they contribute to preventing and tackling homelessness. They are developing more of a homelessness strategy to publish in more of a 'glossy' style so it can be sent to partner organisations. We are keen to see these plans developed in partnership with local authorities to support more local strategic engagement and to breakdown some of the barriers that exist between the sectors.

If you want to discuss your action plan or if you are looking for examples of good practice please contact us.

Homelessness Champions

The Corporation's Homelessness Strategy also asks that associations should nominate a Homelessness Champion. The role will include:

- promoting good practice,
- reminding the association and partners of their duties in relation homelessness,
- leading a review of strategy, services and partnerships,
- encouraging innovation and change,
- driving the development, adoption and delivery of an action plan, including reporting to the association's Board, and
- leading effective assessment of achievements and difficulties in achieving change.

The individual who undertakes the role of Homelessness Champion should have a commitment to preventing and tackling homelessness along with some relevant knowledge. Please let us know who your Homelessness Champion is if you haven't already.

Good practice

As we travel around we are finding very many examples of good practice in the way housing associations prevent and tackle homelessness. Here are just a few that may help you. If you want to find out more please contact us.

Accord HA has a flexible tenure policy that can avoid shared owners who have financial difficulties losing their home.

New Charter HT had a homelessness prevention policy before the Corporation's strategy and already has an action plan.

Optima Community Association, together with two other associations, pays for a Money Advisor from Birmingham City Council

The **ISOS Group** has an anti-poverty strategy that supports its work to prevent homelessness.

Notting Hill HGs RentPlus pilot enables tenants to save and offers bonuses when they take more responsibility for their homes.

Cambridge HS has a range of financial products (branded as New Horizons) available for its tenants through working with Cambridge Building Society.

Circle Anglia Haringey Tenancy Sustainment scheme (HARTS) provides specialist support to vulnerable tenants to avoid repeat homelessness.

New Charter HT has analysed the efficiencies made as a result of its prevention work.

East Thames HG is running a national pilot project to reduce the poverty trap for residents in temporary accommodation.

Flagship HG has reviewed its approach to anti-social behaviour to avoid cases being forced along the legal enforcement route.

Norfolk housing associations are working together to produce a joint sub-regional action plan.

Optima Community Association has agreed a protocol with other associations in Birmingham to meet the housing needs of victims of domestic violence, without the need for these families to make a homelessness application.

New Charter HT has Homelessness Champions at Board level.

A partnership of **RSLs in SE London** are working on a prevention protocol with their partner Boroughs.

Homeless Champions have been working positively with the HAT team in **Peabody, Broomleigh and Pathmeads**.

Servite are working on a family intervention project.

Can you help us?

We aim to help associations by providing examples of good practice but we don't know all the good things you are doing so we are always looking for more examples of good practice. Some of those that we are particularly interested in at the moment are:

- Mortgage rescue schemes,
- Effective employment schemes outside London,
- Schemes to help those with poor literacy skills,
- Effective under-occupation schemes,
- The use of Community Wardens to contribute to the prevention of homelessness,
- Guidance on the use of starter tenancies to ensure that they don't lead to repeat homelessness,
- Approaches to assessing the advice and support needs of those applying for housing,

If you have any examples that may help please contact us. We are especially interested in procedures and other documents that we can share with other associations to help them implement such good practice.

Events

These are some of the events being organised that may be of interest to those working around homelessness. If you know of future events please let us know so we can include them.

NHF Annual Conference
Birmingham
19th - 21st September 2007

CloH Lettings & Homelessness Conference
Nottingham
20th - 22nd November 2007

A series of homelessness summits being organised around the country by CLG.
The first is in Preston on 19th September 2007.

Shelter Homelessness Prevention Conferences

- Leeds, 4th October 2007
- Norwich, 1st November 2007
- Liverpool, 24th January 2008
- Birmingham, 21st February 2008
- Woking, 5th March 2008

Contact us

This update has asked for your input in a number of ways. If you can help us or if you would like us to meet with you please contact us. We are out and about most of the time so it is best to catch us on our mobiles or by email.

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