
12 January 2010

HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SUBJECT

A strategy to support tenants living in temporary accommodation

WARD/S

ALL

CONTRIBUTORS

AD (Housing Options), Head of Accommodation Services.

SYNOPSIS

This report outlines how the use of temporary accommodation provided by the Council for people accepted as statutorily homeless is changing. Traditionally the Housing Options division has provided housing management services with limited support to tenants. This strategy aims to support, incentivise, motivate and empower individuals to become economically self sustaining and have the confidence to explore their other housing options. With support and high quality advice, options such as low cost home ownership. Moving out of the borough, and privately renting will be more accessible to tenants, enabling them to see that social housing is not the only viable or realistic option open to them.

RECOMMENDATION that –
the Committee endorses this strategy and new approach

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A strategy to support tenants living in temporary accommodation

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Councils have a statutory duty to ensure that applicants who are assessed as homeless and who are eligible for assistance have suitable temporary accommodation (TA) until a settled home becomes available.
- 1.2 In January 2005 the Government introduced a target to reduce the use of TA by half by December 2010. This followed other Government homelessness targets including ending the use of bed and breakfast (B&B) for families and ensuring that no 16 and 17 year olds are placed in B&B by 2010 unless in an emergency. H&F has a solid track record of meeting these targets as detailed: no families have been placed into B&B for the last three years as have no 16 or 17 year olds for the last two years. At the time of writing there are 946 households in TA therefore the Government's temporary accommodation target will be met by February 2010 - nearly a year early. This will be a real achievement for an inner London borough with significant housing pressures against the background of a serious recession.
- 1.3 All councils in England and Wales are legally required to produce a homelessness strategy and they are further encouraged to develop temporary accommodation (TA) strategies alongside them. This strategy therefore needs to be read in conjunction with the Housing Options Strategy which was considered by Housing Scrutiny Committee at its meeting of 8th September 2009.

2.0 Objectives

- 2.1 Through this strategy the Housing Options division seeks to ensure that:
 - All temporary accommodation residents have an appropriate package of support which gives them the best chance of making an exit out of homelessness by exploring other housing options other than just social housing;
 - A key part of this is the opening up of opportunities which enable residents to address underlying issues of social exclusion such as improving their confidence and sense of worth, building skills, educational attainment and employability and
 - Through this work contribute to the Council's objective of fostering mixed and balanced communities.
- 2.2 This strategy articulates for the first time an explicit commitment and a plan of action to help residents achieve greater personal independence

where they are able to exert more control over their housing and employment choices.

3.0 Management of Temporary Accommodation

3.1 In order to discharge its duty to provide Temporary Accommodation Hammersmith & Fulham operates a two-stage model with responsibility resting with the Housing Options Division:

Stage one: Emergency and short term provision for the following purposes:

- to discharge an interim duty pending enquiries to establish whether a more substantive homelessness duty is owed;
- to secure accommodation for a short period to give the applicant reasonable opportunity to find accommodation themselves;
- to secure accommodation pending a referral to another authority;
- to discharge a discretionary power to secure accommodation pending a review of a homelessness decision or an appeal to the County Court.

3.2 Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation, hostel accommodation owned by the Council, and voluntary sector provision are all used as first stage accommodation. Whilst applicants in B&B and some hostel accommodation normally have a self-contained room they are required to share both bathing and cooking facilities with other residents.

Stage two: Move-on accommodation for people to whom the Council has confirmed that it has a statutory duty. This consists of:

- Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) procuring and managing properties on behalf of private landlords. The Council currently has 334 such placements.
- Similarly the Housing Options division negotiates with private landlords to procure and manage self-contained leased properties with agreements typically being for two to three years. The Council currently has 486 such leases in place. Forty-five percent of these properties are located in H&F, with the rest spread across London.
- The division negotiates with H&F Homes to make use of a number of permanent empty council homes which have become available as properties have been decanted in order to improve blocks of flats. Such property is let on a bare licence agreement to homeless households and as such the creation of a secure tenancy is avoided. We currently have 78 such properties.

3.3 As can be seen, the majority of the portfolio is property leased from private landlords (PSL). Because these properties are self-contained, and enable tenants to exercise choice with regard to suitability and location and they are provided to a high standard and managed by the

Council, this type of accommodation is often popular with tenants. A significant number (an estimated 70+ this year) elect to remain in the private rented sector when their lease is due to expire. The Housing Options Division facilitates this arrangement on the understanding that the tenant gives up their rights as a homeless applicant. In return they are allowed to remain on the Council's housing register and to remain in band C, thereby being able to bid for a property when one becomes available. Our performance in this regard is the best in London and is of frequent interest to other boroughs.

- 3.4 Because of the success of the Housing Options Division's homelessness prevention and housing options strategies the number of "homelessness acceptances" i.e. people to whom we have a legal duty to provide permanent accommodation has decreased from 443 households in 2006/07 to 172 in 2008/09 and is expected to be at a similar level in 2009/10. This has enabled the Council to decrease the number of units required for first stage accommodation (Council owned hostels) from 161 units to 114 at present. Despite this reduction the average hostel vacancy rate for 2008/09 has been hovering around 20% with a subsequent lost of rental income to the Housing Revenue Account.
- 3.5 In response the number of hostel units will be further reduced to 90 units with the anticipated disposal of the Stewarts Lodge hostel in Lambeth early this year, leaving five Council-owned hostels. A recommendation is to be made to Cabinet at its March 2010 meeting that some of the proceeds from the sale of hostels are reinvested in the existing portfolio to bring them up decent homes standards.
- 3.6 A profile of households in TA - Work has been undertaken to profile the population currently residing in temporary accommodation to help inform this strategy. This research shows that:
 - 80% of households in TA are unemployed and are welfare benefit dependent.
 - Those aged between 18 and 24 are over represented in TA, as are those aged between 35 and 44. All other age groups are under-represented.
 - Females are 1.59 times more likely to appear in TA than in the general population.
 - Black / Black British groups are over four times more likely to appear in TA than in the general population. With the exception of Chinese groups, all BME groups are likely to be overrepresented in TA.
 - Almost 70% of households in TA require family sized units with two, three or four bedrooms.
 - The average length of stay in TA is presently just over two years. This tends to increase with the bedroom requirement of the household.
 - There is a significant overlap between those households in temporary accommodation and contact with adult or children's

social services. 66% of all households in TA contain at least one person known to social services.

- Over 60 people are either registered with a physical disability or known to have a sensory impairment and are currently in TA, with over 30 adults having known mental health problems.

Household composition of those in Temporary Accommodation

Household type	Percentage
Couples	1%
Families	80%
Singles	16%
Singles (under 18)	3%
Total	100%

4.0 A support strategy

4.1 The above data has been used to inform the strategy below. For some households, low level floating support may be sufficient and this service is currently provided by Family Mosaic and Thames Reach (funded by Supporting People); the service is available to all tenants living in any form of temporary accommodation. Support is provided to the person in their own home and is usually for no more than six months. The support offered can include welfare benefits advice, assistance with bidding on choice based lettings, help with finding schools, nurseries, or child care but can also specifically address concerns such as domestic violence, safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, social isolation, and substance misuse. Onward referrals to specialist support and advice agencies can also be made.

4.2 Customer engagement strategy - This strategy has not had the benefit of being informed by the views of the residents in TA themselves. Therefore it cannot be considered that this is the final strategy but an interim one until the Housing Options Division develops a customer engagement strategy that demonstrates a genuine commitment to involve residents more fully in the planning and delivery of the service that they receive. This work is to be progressed in 2010/11 and is included in the divisional business plan.

4.3 Targeting the work of temporary accommodation officers - The role of temporary accommodation officers is to change. Initially they were focussed on supporting households to deal with the transition into temporary accommodation, such as accessing schooling, healthcare, etc and also to deal with issues which led people to become homeless in the first place. Referrals to money management and advice services are essential for those who have a history of debt and arrears. In addition they were responsible for sorting out tenants' repairs problems,

collecting their rent and ensuring that the properties were made available for letting again in as short a time as possible ensuring that periods of rent loss were minimised. Four years ago regular visits to all properties were instigated to check that tenants were satisfied and that properties were being properly looked after. We are reviewing this approach once more as we move away from a service focussed on process to one that is person centred. Many of our tenants do not require regular visits. They pay their rent without fail and report all necessary repairs. We will therefore redirect resources to target those requiring more help and support and will work with them to ensure that they are able to remain living independently.

- 4.4 All staff in the Housing Options Division have recently attended training that assists them in focussing on how to work in a person centred way and which seeks to influence customer behaviour so that people are able to take up the many opportunities available to them to get back into education, training, and employment. This training has been very well received by staff as they were, in part, involved in its design.
- 4.5 Housing Officers working with tenants in temporary accommodation will now offer as a matter of routine a wider range of options including:
- the opportunity to move into a privately rented property in an area of the tenant's choice;
 - employment advice and guidance;
 - childcare and financial inclusion advice
 - a chance to participate in the life coaching programme (see below);
- 4.6 Housing Officers will become ambassadors for these new services and will be actively involved in developing the customer engagement strategy. At the same time they will continue to ensure that basic housing management functions are provided to an excellent standard and are cost effective.
- 4.7 Improved communication -The Division has also committed itself to further improve the way it communicates with tenants by:
- holding twice yearly fairs which will highlight child care, employment, volunteering, apprenticeship, education and training opportunities, as well as health promotion.
 - Produce a bi-annual newsletter for residents highlighting the above and other opportunities;
- 4.8 Safeguarding Children and vulnerable adults, including domestic violence - Given that over 78% of households in TA have children the division is working closely with colleagues in Children's Services to ensure that appropriate information on a need to know basis is shared between child protection and housing professionals regarding children on the at risk and child protection register. Households on these registers sometimes seek to avoid involvement with statutory services,

although research has shown that the professionals that they are most likely to have contact with are housing officers.

- 4.9 Information sharing protocols are to be developed to ensure that temporary accommodation officers are aware of such cases and assist social workers by providing an additional pair of eyes and ears in order to maximise the safeguarding of vulnerable children and adults.
- 4.10 All staff in the division are currently going through safeguarding children and vulnerable adults training. Currently, through a concerted effort the number of staff in the division who have attended safeguarding children training has increased from two per cent and is currently 40%. This is expected to rise to 100% by March 2010 with the division commissioning this training independently because Children's Services training is fully subscribed. The division is also working closely with Standing Together, a voluntary agency which coordinates the ground-breaking multi-agency response to the crime of domestic violence. The agency provides training to all staff on how to respond to the victims of domestic violence or on what action to take when they suspect domestic violence is an issue with the tenants they are working with.

4.11 16-17 year olds

The Housing Options Division is worked closely with Children's Services to implement the May 2009 House of Lords Southwark Ruling. In practice, homeless 16-17 year olds cannot be assessed, as previously, under the Housing Act 1996 but under the Children's Act 1989. Since 2002, this group has represented a significant number of homelessness acceptances, with an average 15 presentations a week, with five to seven being accommodated each week. The reason for this high placement rate was because Housing Options have been able to offer Supporting People-funded supported accommodation to young people as an immediate cost effective solution in order to prevent a long term and costly rehousing duty. Since the ruling was implemented on the 1st September 2009, 57 out of 73 homeless young people were returned to their family home and 10 young people have been offered supported accommodation.

- 4.12 Responding to the needs of disabled people - Currently 60 people are registered with a physical disability reside in TA. In the last two years the division has converted two hostel units to ensure they are fully wheelchair accessible. There are plans for a further two units to be converted this year. We will ensure that our temporary accommodation staff receive training on disability awareness and that in devising the customer engagement strategy we work with Hammersmith & Fulham Action on Disability and the Disability Forum to ensure temporary accommodation services meet the needs of those living with a disability.

- 4.13 Lone parents - During the last two years the Borough has made innovative changes to its *scheme of allocation* (see www.lbhf.gov.uk/allocations) as part of a conscious and targeted effort to offer incentives to lone parents not in work residing in TA, among others.

The barriers that prevent lone parents from re-entering the labour market are well known, including justified fears about being financially worse off in full time work and the high cost of arranging child care support. With intensive and specialist support provided by the housing and employment team located in the Housing Options division these barriers can be successfully overcome.

- 4.14 In order to demonstrate to lone parent households the effort and commitment required on their part to engage in this support programme, 30 social housing tenancies per annum are specifically ring-fenced for lone parents who come through this programme and who go on to sustain employment for a minimum period of six months. If they meet the criteria they have their banding on choice based lettings systems increased from band C to band B and with a new priority date backdated by a year. This puts them in a favourable position to bid successfully for properties advertised under the lone parent quota. To date 21 lone parent families have achieved rehousing via this route.
- 4.15 Life coaching programme- We intend to further extend the theme of building in opportunity for households living in TA with the enhanced housing options programme (see Housing Scrutiny Committee papers for the 8th September 2009 giving a short overview of the programme www.lbhf.gov.uk/housingscrutiny). A key aspect of the programme is to develop a "life coaching" service for households in TA who are unemployed and who face barriers in returning to work.
- 4.16 The aim of the life coaching is to provide initially 50 residents with personalised and relatively long-term support to build confidence and look holistically at the changes they wish to make for themselves and their families. Whilst the coaching sessions will present an opportunity for residents to focus on their personal ambitions and motivations across a wide variety of areas, the overall programme aims to help participants move towards their goal of getting back into work. As such, all participants will be encouraged to take up referrals to the housing and employment team following completion of the coaching programme. This employment-focused support will consist of practical career guidance, CV development, interview preparation, securing of work placements, and once employed, it will offer a period of "in work support" to ensure that the resident sustains their employment.
- 4.17 An independent evaluator has been appointed to monitor the coaching programme and to report on its outcomes; as well as providing future recommendations for the delivery of such services. This will help us develop better performance management systems that capture qualitative information alongside quantitative information on the outcomes achieved for households in temporary accommodation other than just simply recording how long they have spent in accommodation.
- 4.18 Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities-Given the cultural diversity of residents within TA, the coaching programme is being designed to be

as inclusive as possible for residents with language or cultural considerations. For example, the project team are working with local Somali organisations to ensure the service is delivered in a way that makes it accessible to that group of residents, further breaking down the barriers that lead certain groups to experience higher levels of social and economic exclusion.

In 2010/11 the Housing Options division will be launching an action plan regards how it intends to provide more support to members of BME communities, including ensuring translation and interpretation services are readily available where English is not a tenants first language.

5. Conclusion

By providing these diverse methods of support, our programmes seek to incentivise, motivate, and empower individuals to become economically self sustaining and to have the confidence to explore their other housing options. With support and high quality advice, options such as low cost home ownership, moving out of the Borough, and renting privately will be more accessible to tenants, enabling them to see that social housing is not the only viable or realistic option open to them.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 -
LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

No.	Description of Background Papers	Name/Ext of holder of file/copy	Department/Location
1.	Housing Options Strategy 2009-12	Jonathan Weavers, x4148	Housing Options Division
2.	Supporting People Strategy	Rachel Soni, x1723	Adult Social Care