

raising the roof

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InterACT VHG regional conference 2002

The InterACT conference in November 2002 was a regional conference on Supporting People and the Homelessness Act organised by VHG.

Members from across the region travelled to Peterborough to hear keynote sessions from Joe Tuke of the Homelessness Directorate, Nick Reed of the Housing Corporation, Nigel Rogers of SITRA and Andrew Van Doorn of Homeless Link. There were 16 workshops attended by delegates on various aspects of the Supporting People Programme and the prevention of homelessness including 'Floating Support', Rent deposit schemes, Housing drug users and Housing ex-offenders. There were also

workshops on funding and Compact development.

The conference was an exciting event and it evaluated extremely well although VHG intends to do

even better this year! The networking with voluntary and statutory sector organisations both within the region and with national organisations was a very important aspect of the conference. It was great to have input from service users at the 'Speakout' session and throughout both days as delegates.

The full evaluation and a

John Hales, St. Martin's Housing Trust. Emma Daniel, VHG. Nick Reed, Housing Corporation

snapshot of the event is available from VHG as our third Managing Inclusion Briefing which includes details of the videos available from this event and useful web links. If you weren't able to attend this event please order a video of the plenary sessions of most use to your organisation.



Changes to Misuse of Drugs Legislation - update

Section 8(d) of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 was amended by section 38 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. Previously, it was illegal for organisations to allow cannabis or prepared opium to be used on their premises. The change extended this to all controlled substances and so will include heroin, crack, cocaine, amphetamines, LSD, ecstasy etc. This legislation has not yet come into force, but will do so if statutory Guidance to accompany it is released.

Having considered the draft Guidance and consulted with a range of agencies and interested parties it seems that the law, if enacted, would be unworkable and detrimental to drug users, voluntary organisations and the public at large. It would result in a large number of homeless people with drug problems returning to the street or unable to access accommodation and support.

The Guidance expects agencies owning or managing premises to contact the police whenever they suspect substance misuse and take active steps to prevent further misuse. This would be unworkable as many agencies aim to get drug users

off the street and stabilised before treatment is possible, which means accepting drug use may continue for a while. If this legislation were enacted, to ensure they act legally, organisations would have to stop allowing use on their premises and thus effectively stop working with this client group.

Those agencies whose policies don't allow drug use on their premises but do work with large numbers of active drug users are likely to tighten up procedures and make the consequences of use or suspected use on premises more severe, including reporting it to the police and eviction. This approach would destroy

trust carefully built up between clients and agencies. If vulnerable drug users feel they are going to be reported to the police they are likely to exclude themselves from residential and other services. The net consequence would inevitably be a rise in the numbers of people using drugs on the street and in other public places, and a rise in homelessness and rough sleeping.

The draft Guidance states "in deciding whether to charge a person under the amended legislation police officers must use discretion... If the person has been motivated by harm reduction factors when committing an offence under section 8(d) of the Act these should be taken into account by the police when deciding whether it is correct to instigate a prosecution". However, the guidance does not actually make it legal for services to allow substance misuse on their premises whatever the motivation, harm reduction or otherwise. In our view organisations will now be forced to make a choice: either expect staff to act illegally, or to refuse to put their staff at risk in this way. Given the first is not an

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Changes to Misuse of Drugs Legislation - update

Continued from front cover

option for agency managers, their Boards or their funders they will have in reality no option but to stop working with drug users. The discretionary nature of the guidance also gives cause for concern because of the regional variations this could lead to and the different interpretations, which could be made by different police officers. No matter how good a service's relationship with its local police force, the situation could quickly change due to changes in personnel. We fear that organisations could also find themselves in a more vulnerable position when faced with NIMBY attitudes and potential pressure brought to bear on authorities and regulators by vociferous opponents of their work due to the 'unattractive' nature of homeless and substance misusing client groups.

Finally, a decision to act illegally would have potential implications for charitable status. Our view is that agencies and staff working with difficult and vulnerable people should expect the protection of the law as long as they act responsibly and within the law. Legal opinion suggests that however the Guidance is worded, continuing to work in established and agreed ways with drug users following enactment of the legislation will mean acting illegally.

Homeless Link is in discussion with the Home Office and ODPM about the legislation. We have also been in discussion with the major national drug and homelessness agencies and Lis Pritchard has sent a letter to the Home Secretary from us on behalf of this broad coalition outlining the concerns contained in this briefing. Organisations should not panic but should ensure they are aware of the implications of the proposals on their work. They should inform trustee boards of the potential legal and employment implications. The Homeless Link website

www.homeless.org.uk will carry regular updates. For further information or discussion contact Tara Bradley or Martin Goodwin 020 7960 3020.
tara.bradley@homelesslink.org.uk
martin.goodwin@homelesslink.org.uk
by Andrew Van Doorn Homeless Link

Healthy Information teams' new 'Heron' takes flight



The Health Information team is proud to announce that their health and social care website, Heron, is now live and can be found at www.heron.nhs.uk. The website is a comprehensive and searchable

database holding information on more than 900 self-help groups, statutory and voluntary agencies covering the whole of Norfolk.

Heron is available to everyone who needs to locate sources of help or support either

professionally, for themselves or their families via the internet. For those who do not have access to the internet this can be obtained through the public library service.

Heron is a live database and is maintained and regularly audited in accordance with the Data Protection Act. This means the information on it will always be as up to date as possible.

Heron's minder, Database and Resources Officer, Rosemary Topping Said: "Now that everyone can access Heron we want people to get into the habit of using it every day to find contacts and information. Printing off sections of records and filing is discouraged because print information goes out of date so quickly"

The website design has been kept simple for quick and easy retrieval of information and provides instant links to NHS Direct, NHS.UK, the Department of Health and UK Online. User notes are available on the opening screen of the database by clicking on help. However if you have difficulty in using the site please contact Rosemary or Lynn on 01603 307419 or Email them on Rosemary.Topping@norfolk.nhs.uk or Lynn.Kent@norfolk.norfolk.nhs.uk.

Local Connections strategy examined in Cambridge

Cambridge City Council announced a Local Connections Policy as a major part of its homeless strategy for the coming year.

While the idea for the policy came from a similar system operating in Brighton and Hove it appeared without documentation as to how it was working or how it would translate to Cambridge.

Met with a good deal of concern by agencies working with the homeless and with angry disbelief from people on the street The Cambridge Homeless Partnership determined it was vital to conduct some research into Local Connection Policy.

Current Local Connections for Local Authorities

A Council can, if it wishes, refer an applicant to another council. This can be done only if the applicant does not have a connection with the first council; does have a connection with the other council and there is no threat of violence in the second area.

A local connection is applied to those who currently reside in the area or has for 6 of the last 12 months or 3 of the last 5 years; is employed in the area other than armed forces; has family resident for 5 years in the area; and special circumstances e.g. previously resided in the area for a long time. In addition, if the council to which they are being referred has accommodated them previously in the last 5 years.

The local connection criteria are to be applied to everyone accessing any homeless service funded by the council or the Homelessness Directorate. The motivation

behind this policy is to prioritise 'local resources for local people' in areas that are 'full up'.

The Cambridge Homeless Partnership Research

Original aims:

- To investigate the processes, outcomes and possible impact to the introduction of a local connections criteria

- To investigate the use of rent deposit schemes as a viable alternative for those with no local connection who wish to live in Cambridge

- Utilise the research through a dynamic process, facilitating the inclusion of creative and innovative ideas that will contribute positively to the local connection strategy

Objectives:

- To consult with service users in Cambridge

- To promote partnership with Cambridge University Support for the Homeless

- Researching the local connection criteria in Brighton

- To develop models for rent deposit schemes in Cambridge

Research

1. Interviews with agencies in Brighton: 9

agencies were approached to discuss their work with regard to local connection policy.

2. Consultation with service users in Cambridge: In conjunction with the Cambridge University Support for Homeless (CUSH) 18 interviews were conducted over a 2 week period, initially comprising of a general questionnaire about local connections. After research in Brighton, CHP conducted a group interview with 12 clients on the proposed local connection policy and more general topics around the experiences of homelessness. 6 of the interviewees formed a focus group to look specifically at the local connection policy.

3. The rent deposit scheme: CHP spent time at Oxford City Council offices looking at their rent deposit scheme and began discussion with the National Rent Deposit Forum in Birmingham. During this time South Cambridgeshire District Council began a pilot scheme in the South Cambridgeshire area in association with King Street Housing.

Results

Brighton: The local connection policy in Brighton and Hove (fig.1) was rolled out as part of a wider single homeless strategy taking a partnership approach to implementation. Local service providers contributing to the strategy 'signed up' to the partnership agreement for the strategy and the incorporated local connection policy.

This meant:

- The City council expected partner agencies to work closely in implementing

the strategy and primarily the local connection policy.

- Agencies who did not 'sign up' were 'unlikely to receive further funding from the Council to operate services for single homeless people'.

- If partner agencies provide services outside of the local connection policy the Council 'would have no choice but to end the partnership with that particular agency'.
- The way in which some services operated had to change e.g. the New Stein Mews hostel had been direct access but now accepts by referral only.

Consultations with service users

The questionnaires and discussions with service users identified that under the definitions of 'local connections' most would not meet the criteria and a lack of understanding could easily result in individuals not recognising their local connection and being sent away. If referred to another local authority most service users said they would not return to their designated area without assurances of support and accommodation and would return to Cambridge in the event of these being unavailable in their area of local connection. Highlighting the need for council's to allow individuals to have some input into the alternative area for relocation and to put them in touch with new support services.

by Rebecca Foreman,
Cambridge Homeless Partnership

Newsinbrief

Rural Housing Need Assessment

The Norfolk Rural Community Council is currently carrying out a survey with Parish Councils into rural housing need. Look out for the results of this survey in *Raising the Roof*. If you are interested in getting involved with this survey or finding out more please contact Melissa Adcock. Tel: 01760 755420 or email to melissa@norfolkrccl.org.uk

Norfolk Supporting People Forum and Providers Pack

All providers in Norfolk have been invited to attend a series of events designed to provide information and an opportunity for surgeries with members of the Supporting Team. Providers have also received an information pack provided in partnership with VHG which provides briefings, documents and contact information on all aspects of Supporting People in Norfolk. For further information or to receive a Providers Pack (One per organisation in Norfolk) please email vhg-east@tiscali.co.uk and we will pass your details on to the team.

Training for Advice Providers

There are two training days with SITRA for advice providers on the Supporting People programme. This training is designed to prepare advice providers with information they will need to respond to enquiries from people living in supported accommodation. The dates are 29th January (Norwich) and 30th January (King's Lynn). The cost of this training is £20. Please email VHG for further information and a booking form vhg-east@tiscali.co.uk

Release Drug's University 3

The Release Drug's University has become an essential date on the calendar for those working with drug users. Drugs University brings together professionals involved in drugs work for two days of listening, sharing, discussion and debate around issues that are going to be critical for that field. This event takes place in London on 27th-28th January 2003. To book your place or for more information please telephone 020 7729 2599.

Training Dates

DEBT AWARENESS COURSE

21-01-03 09.30AM – 1.30PM

Norwich Trainer: Karen Bunn Cost: Free

SUPPORTING PEOPLE FOR ADVICE PROVIDERS

29-01-03 9-30AM TO 4-30PM

Norwich Trainer: SITRA Cost: £20

SUPPORTING PEOPLE FOR ADVICE PROVIDERS

30-01-03 9-30AM TO 4-30PM

Kings Lynn Trainer: SITRA Cost: £20

SUCCESSFUL KEYWORKING

18-02-03 9-30AM TO 4-30PM

Norwich Trainer: Clare Pastorius

Cost: £75 (members)

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

24-02-03 & 25-02-03 (2 days)

Norwich Trainer: Brian Walker

Cost: £120 (members)

FURTHER INFO

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING OUR TRAINING PLEASE PHONE KERRY ON 01603 617299.

ADDITIONAL COURSES

ADDITIONAL COURSES THAT MAY BE RUN IF THERE IS ADEQUATE INTEREST: RELAPSE PREVENTION (A FOLLOW ON FROM MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING) AND WOMEN'S SELF-DEFENCE. PLEASE LET US KNOW IF YOU WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THESE COURSES.

IF THERE IS A NEED FOR A COURSE AND WE CAN ATTRACT DELEGATES WE WILL ENDEAVOUR TO ARRANGE IT IF YOU MAKE US AWARE OF THE NEED.

WE CAN ALSO ARRANGE "IN HOUSE" COURSES FOR YOUR STAFF FOR A SMALL FEE ADDED TO THE COST OF THE TRAINER. VHG IS WILLING TO HELP YOU SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS AROUND STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND IF WE CANNOT HELP YOU WE WILL FIND SOMEONE WHO CAN.

Extra money for affordable housing.

New proposals to amend local authority regulations on capital receipts could release up to £70 million each year for the provision of affordable housing. A recent consultation document recommends allowing councils greater freedom and flexibility to manage their housing assets, by allowing them to spend more money from capital receipts.

Capital receipts will come in the main from sales of council housing or land. Under current rules a set amount of the income from such sales is classified as a "reserved part" and can only be used for reducing debt. The remainder of the income (the technically named "usable part") can be used for any capital expenditure. The problem at the moment is that the reserved part is 75% of the income of the sale of council housing and 50% from the sale of land. Many critics have said that these large proportions have acted as a major disincentive to local authorities selling assets in order to fund better quality replacement housing as the amount of money left is normally insufficient to pay for a replacement.

Under the proposed changes, local authorities will be able to spend 100% of this income as long as the money is used to provide affordable housing. The government hopes that this will enable local authorities to

replace inefficient housing with modern dwellings better suited to the needs of today's tenants. However the plans only go so far – right to buy sales, large-scale voluntary transfers of housing stock and small-scale voluntary transfers is excluded, as they are not seen as the result of a "pro – active disposal" policy. Further information on the proposals can be found on the Internet at www.housing.odpm.gov.uk/information/consult/index.htm

In a separate move the government has announced its intention to change the Housing Act 1985 so that it will be easier for councils to enter Private Finance Initiative arrangements. The Housing Revenue Account PFI, as it is known uses private sector funding to refurbish council houses and thereafter to provide housing services. Under the scheme, people remain tenants of the local authority. To date eight authorities in England have piloted the scheme with a further ten due to start projects in 2002/2003. If you are particularly into Housing Revenue Account issues you can find more information on the Internet at

www.housing.odpm.gov.uk/information/hra/index.htm

Mark Kitney

HLG (Nottingham)

A day in the life of...

A typical day for me starts half an hour before the alarm goes off at 5.30am, my internal clock never fails to beat the digital one. Tea goes a long way to charging up my batteries and insulating me when out tending to geese, goats, chickens, dogs and cats first thing in the morning, all of who demand attention. I manage something akin to breakfast with my family before heading off at 6.45am for what can sometimes be a two-hour trek from King's

Lynn to Norwich – traffic dictates as always. I don't mind the journey though at this time of the year leaving and returning in darkness can be tough.

The workday is diary driven but invariably it falls apart as people bring things you can't anticipate and just refused to be governed by my diary! Time can be lost just simply because clients don't stay put and you can visit numerous times before actually making contact. It can be frustrating but in many ways it's the unpredictability of the job that gets me up in the morning along with that ever faithful alarm and the joy of Radio 4's Farming Today program!

The job is varied and interesting with nothing that can be described as typical. Risk

assessments are crucial, as you never know what you're walking into. I like to be where the action is and at St. Martin's there's plenty of that. Clients move in and out, some have very limited support needs others will need ongoing support for a year or more. Sometimes it seems as though our support achieves very little but its small steps all the way and I know that without us clients would end up 100 paces back.

Jeff Compton – Floating Support Worker, St. Martin's Housing Trust

We have an on-call system for those out-of-hours emergencies starting at 5pm and finishing at the 8am hand over. It's there to cover the temporary accommodation units and group homes. So fights, fracas and fires at 2 o'clock in the morning will require another trip from Lynn to Norwich but with much less traffic to battle with!

My day ends at 4pm or at least that's what's written in my diary but somehow my diary never has learnt to tell the time!