

News in Brief

Launch of regional VHG 'Diversity Works!' Network

The 6th May 2004 will see the launch of the VHG Diversity Works which will involve a series of Briefings (which will include information and practical exercises) and bi-monthly network meetings which will involve drama, music, art and workshop exercises to encourage organisational 'champions' within the VHG network to bring their Equalities policies to life! This project has been funded by a grant from Lloyds TSB. Training courses will also be developed to run alongside these meetings. To book your place on the launch of this network please contact Lynne at VHG by telephoning 01603 617299 or email lynne@vhg-east.org

New 'Tallent' at VHG

Lynne Tallent (below left) has joined the VHG staff team as the Office Assistant. She will be the first point of contact for most members and has taken on the training course bookings and enquiries. To contact Lynne please email lynne@vhg-east.org or telephone 01603 617299. We also welcome Emmalouise Ward (below right) as our Researcher who will take the



lead on our Gtr Norwich Common Monitoring and Temporary Accommodation Data research projects. Emmalouise will be working part-time for VHG whilst completing her PhD

at the UEA. To contact Emmalouise please email Emmalouise@vhg-east.org or telephone 01603 617299.

Broadland making the right choice!

Broadland Housing Association is introducing a Choice Based Lettings Scheme for their properties which means that they advertise vacancies through the local press. Applicants registered with their local authority will then get banded into gold, silver or bronze category depending on their needs. Properties will be categorised as available to applicants in the gold, silver or bronze band and then viewings will be arranged. This system has many advantages and is proven to provide more sustainable tenancies as well as happier customers

Launch of National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

The government's long awaited National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy, released on 15 March 2004, was generally welcomed by leading alcohol misuse agencies as a first step toward tackling the harm and cost of alcohol misuse.

It is estimated that 3 million people are addicted to alcohol and 8 million are drinking at risky levels. The Strategy Unit has estimated the cost of alcohol misuse is now around £20bn a year, when taking into account related health disorders and disease, crime and antisocial behaviour, productivity in the workplace, and the impact on families, including domestic violence.

The strategy proposes a raft of measures to combat the harms and costs of alcohol misuse in England and prevent further increase in alcohol-related harms. These include providing better education and communication about responsible drinking and 'the active management of the night time economy' by police and statutory authorities.

Help for the most vulnerable

We are encouraged to see that the strategy includes proposals to improve support for vulnerable groups, including homeless people. It acknowledges that around half of the rough sleepers population is reliant on alcohol and many other homeless people have problems with alcohol. Alcohol Concern estimates that of the 10,000 people attending alcohol services for support with their problem, eighteen per cent are homeless. Crucially, the strategy recognises the difficulties alcohol users with multiple needs have

accessing appropriate treatment and it highlights the fact that lack of follow-up decreases the effectiveness of any treatment that is received.

£19.6 million has already been allocated to help vulnerable people with alcohol problems in 2004/5 through the Supporting People programme. However, apart from proposals to develop guidance on 'integrated care pathways for the most vulnerable' there is little to suggest that the strategy will have an impact on homeless drinkers.

The Strategy acknowledges that the £95m spent a year on specialist services is a fraction of the £1.7bn spent by NHS on

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dealing with alcohol related diseases, but while there are proposals to carry out a national audit of the capacity of and demand for alcohol services, there is no mention of a commitment to funding existing services.

What is the difference?

Alcohol Concern points out that, while the strategy marks a good first step it does nothing to resolve the short term crisis in funding and capacity in services.

By Homeless Link, 17th March 2004 - www.homelesslink.org.uk

Norcas are running free morning seminars for businesses in Norfolk and Suffolk entitled **Drugs, Alcohol and the Workplace - current problems future solutions**. The event will cover the Nature and extent of substance misuse related problems, Promoting a successful workplace policy, implementation and review, Accessing suitable treatment. Events dates are as follows: Thurs 27th May, Ecotech Centre, Swaffham. Weds 9th June, British Racing School, Newmarket. Tues 6th July, Swan Hotel, Southwold. All run from 9.30 am to 12.30 pm to reserve a place contact NORCAS Training and Consultancy on 01603 621116/227048 or email at training@norcas.org.uk

Iceni Homes - Joining forces for development!

Three Housing Associations in the East of England, Cotman Housing Association, Colne Housing Society and Suffolk Housing Society, have joined forces to set up a development company called Iceni Homes with the aim of increasing the supply of affordable homes.

The new joint venture has been brought into being as a direct response to the Housing Corporation's Partnering proposals, with the clear aim of becoming one of the main players in the East of England market. It will operate like any other commercial development company and will contract out the building work. These services will be made available to other associations and organisations that do not have their own development expertise.

Mark Powell Davies, Chief Executive of Colne Housing Society said; "The strength of Iceni Homes is in the expertise of the existing partners and the geographic area that we cover between us. The local knowledge we all have mean we can develop a wider range of housing potentially on a bigger scale, but without losing sight of the importance of rural, key worker and supported housing which is essential to long term sustainability for local communities."

The Housing Corporation enthusiastically applauded the development of the new company and Nick Reed, Regional Investment Director said: "The Corporation warmly welcomes the innovation

shown by the three partners in pursuing this new concept, and wishes them well in the fulfilment of their plans. We recognise that housing associations will increasingly require radical thinking to position themselves to face the growing challenges which confront them."

Pictured: Robert Leng – Chairman Colne Housing Society, Brian White – Chairman Suffolk Housing Society and Antoinette Faulkner – Chairman Cotman Housing Association.



Key Worker Living Programme Announced

A new £ 690million 'Key Worker Living' programme to help keep the skills needed in key front line public services, such as in education, health, and community safety, has been launched by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott today.

The announcement was supported by Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clarke and Secretary of State for Health, John Reid.

The new programme builds on the success of the Starter Home Initiative, which is on track to place over 9,000 key workers into home ownership by 31 March 2004, with a further 1200 expected to complete purchases in the first few weeks of the new financial year.

'Key Worker Living' offers four simple options, including home ownership packages and intermediate rental solutions and will be marketed by one-stop-shops located in London, the South East and the East of England, where house prices are high and recruitment and retention is difficult.

Eligibility varies across the regions depending on local recruitment and retention priorities.

The Deputy Prime Minister said housing is at the top of this Government's agenda, along with jobs, schools, health and the fight against crime.

"We are determined to make a difference in the performance of our schools and hospitals and help those working in community safety. The 'Key Worker Living' programme offers housing solutions to those in front line roles in key public services in London, the South East and the East where recruitment and retention is particularly difficult."

For more information go to www.odpm.gov.uk .



Training Dates

21st April 2004
LONE WORKER PERSONAL SAFETY

12th May 2004
INVOLVING SERVICE USERS

19th May 2004
**WORKING WITH PEOPLE WHO
SELF INJURE**

2nd June 2004
WELFARE BENEFITS

16th June 2004
**INTRODUCTION TO HOUSING LAW
AND HOMELESSNESS**

All the above courses will be held at the King of Hearts in central Norwich between 10am - 4pm with lunch provided.

Rates: £75 members, £125 non-members (unless stated).

VHG Networks/Events

28th April 2004 10am - 12noon
FOCUS ON THE FUTURE NETWORK
King of Hearts, Norwich
(Subscription £100 per annum) –
Open to senior Managers and Chief Executives of VHG member organisations and operates as a peer support network and strategy group.

6th May 2004 1pm - 5pm
DIVERSITY WORKS! LAUNCH
King's Centre, Rose Lane, Norwich
Free - Open to all VHG members from front line staff to trustees – you don't have to have any prior training or knowledge of Equalities and Diversity to join!

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
REGARDING OUR TRAINING PLEASE
PHONE THE LYNNE TALLENT ON
01603 617299. OR BOOK ONLINE
www.vhg-east.org**

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A day in the life of...

After a quick perusal of my new emails and an attempt to deal with the easy ones, I leave the office early for a 9.30am meeting with Andrew Cullen, Director of Sales and Marketing at Norwich City Football Club, to discuss an initiative that we are working on called 'Fair Play', an anti-bullying scheme. Technology teacher Sarah Minty and Head teacher Cherry Crowley of Flegg High School near Gt. Yarmouth are leading the initiative, which is aimed at copying and developing the peer mentoring scheme they have successfully implemented at the school. The aim is to apply 'Fair Play' to other organisations and schools within the community to develop a joint approach to care and well being.

At midday I drive to visit a street in Sprowston where we have had various complaints surrounding nuisance behaviour by young people. Extra visits are made to help reassure families and two Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) have been signed. ABCs are written agreements between young people and a partner agency, such as a

housing association, and the police, not to carry on with their anti-social behaviour. All is quiet here today, with no signs of any new problems.

By 1.30pm I have arrived at Redmayne

Mike van der Es
Community Development Manager
for Wherry Housing Association, a
member of Anglia Housing Group

View for the official opening of a new housing with care scheme that was built as the result of a partnership between Wherry, Broadland District Council, Lovells and social services. One of the most exciting achievements is our partnership with the local middle school and for the opening they have provided us with a host of carol singers and have painted a mural that is duly unveiled by a guest of honour. I deliver some small presents to the children who have done so much to welcome our new residents into the scheme. After networking with the guests, residents and partners attending it is time to help tidy up and go home after a satisfying and rewarding end to the day.



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Robson Rhodes Ringing in the Changes

Most VHG members will already be aware of the Robson Rhodes report commissioned by the Government into the Supporting People programme and published in February 2004. The implications of the report are various and at this stage it is unclear about the overall impact to voluntary sector providers. The report makes 40 recommendations around the costs and administration of the Supporting People programme.

Cuts

It is unclear how many of the recommendations that the ODPM will adopt but cost cutting measures are a clear priority. As SITRA describes: 'the SP budget will be £1.801bn for 2004/05. ODPM say this represents a cut of around 0.7% before inflation, and also require Administering Authorities (AAs) to make efficiency savings of up to 2.5%. Other commentators feel it amounts to something more like a 4.5 – 5% cut in real terms.' Most AAs are making these cuts by cutting out an inflationary increase this year and further cuts will be looked at through the service reviews.

Value for money and strategic relevance are the key issues that the management of voluntary sector service providers need to examine. One of the unfair aspects of these 'across the board' type cuts is that the AAs who are already spending less and whose provision is already in the lower quartiles of the Value for Money tables have been forced to make the same cuts as those who are in the highest quartiles. The Spending Review will set the funding available in 2005/06 and service providers will need to be ready to respond to this review.

Providers: Thriving or surviving?

Many larger service providers are taking a pragmatic view of cuts as they can afford to absorb the impact of a lack of inflationary increase and have adapted well to the extra administration brought by the Supporting People programme. Some see reviews as a good means of continually improving service delivery. There are huge concerns for

smaller specialist providers who are already groaning under the weight of paperwork, reviews, and recruitment issues and that will require much more support if the service is to thrive.

The message from many umbrella organisations and larger national providers is that we have 'experienced 'Christmas' in the form of the Supporting People programme and now it shouldn't be unexpected that belts need to be tightened'. Emma Daniel, Chief Executive of VHG's response to this view is: "The reform that the Supporting People programme has brought to the sector is extremely positive and whilst cuts are inevitable I would like to see those cuts made in a more targeted way and not 'across the board', I am also concerned that the voluntary sector isn't seen as the easy fat to cut by AAs over the coming years. I also welcome closer scrutiny of the Commissioning process in the future and would like to see user and voluntary sector representation on these boards increasing."

There are positive steps that voluntary sector organisations can make in this atmosphere of uncertainty:

- Ensure that your service is providing 'Value for Money' – work with any local, regional and/or national umbrella organisations to find a benchmarking group.
- Ensure that your internal administration is capable of coping with the increased demands of the SP programme. Increasing staff numbers might not always be the only response but some



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reorganisation could make a huge difference.

- Ensure that your service is of 'strategic relevance' and that you contribute to the development of strategy work and meet with other providers to understand their position.
- Ensure that your organisation is making the best use of its partnerships and is giving as much as it is receiving to partners.
- Ensure that partnerships are felt at all levels in the organisation not just Chief Executive to Chief Executive.

VHG member organisations can apply for membership of the Focus on the Future network (cost £100) which meets on a bi-monthly basis to explore these issues. Please email emma@vhg-east.org for further information on this network. It is aimed at Senior Managers and Chief Executives.

For a briefing on the Robson Rhodes report please go to the following websites:
SITRA – www.sitra.org.uk
National Housing Federation – www.housing.org.uk

