

Supporting People – Further Cuts

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Following the Robson Rhodes review the Government cut Supporting People budgets across the country by around 5% with an actual reduction of 2.5% efficiency cuts and no inflationary increase.

Local Authorities such as Hampshire and Oldham fear cuts of up to 10 %. Some authorities are warning the Government that the cuts they will have to make are likely to be much higher in order to keep within their budgets. Hampshire Council, for example, is making cuts of £3.2 million of its £33.4 million Supporting People budget this year.

Fears for the voluntary sector providers are that these cuts will be passed down the chain to them putting even more pressure on already stretched services. The VHG Focus on the Future Forum for senior managers and Chief Executives of voluntary providers has looked in depth at this issue. 'We would ask Administering Authorities to explore cost cutting at an administration level first and an increased level of support for smaller specialist services.'

Emma Daniel, Chief Executive of VHG said, 'The continual change and uncertainty

over the last two years is taking its toll on smaller providers. Umbrella organisations such as VHG, SITRA and HACT have attempted to provide support and guidance in this process but this puts an additional pressure on services as managers and front line staff are absent through attending training sessions, events and conferences in an attempt to keep abreast. The Government at both a central and local level must now put the brakes on if their primary concern is the service user and the quality service provision rather than appeasing the Treasury.' Emma praised the adaptability of the voluntary sector providers, 'They have risen admirably to every challenge thrown at them in terms of improving services, monitoring and value for money but if the effects of this effort aren't to be wasted we need time to catch our breath, review our progress and look to the future.'

Crisis calls for action on squatting

Some of society's most excluded and vulnerable people are using squats as there is no other option for them.

Crisis is calling for swift action from Government to tackle this issue as highlighted in their recently published report, 'Life on the margins: The Experiences of Homeless People Living in Squats'.

The research shows that homeless people with mental health issues, who have been in care or prison and with drug and alcohol addictions, are more likely to squat than those without them. Of the homeless squatters interviewed: 52% had been in prison, 46% were drug dependent, 37% had mental ill health, 35% had been in care and 15% had learning disabilities.

Shaks Ghosh, Chief Executive of Crisis (pictured below) said: 'This report reveals just what a miserable, depressing and unsafe existence it is for homeless people forced to live in squats that are all too often damp, uninhabitable and derelict.

Living in a squat is neither appropriate for vulnerable homeless people nor is it an answer to their homelessness. People living in squats must be given the vital support services they need and the chance to rebuild their lives.'

Life on the Margins can be downloaded free from the Crisis Research Bank – www.crisis.org.uk/researchbank



News in Brief

iN the East – NHF warn of housing meltdown

The National Housing Federation's report into the housing situation in the East of England illustrates the pressure on the current housing stock through London and Cambridge commuters leading to a house price increase of 73% since 1999 from an average of £93,175 to £175,750 in 2003. The number of households on council waiting lists has risen 21% since 1999.

For a copy of the iN the East report please go to www.housing.org.uk

Involving Service Users

*Involvement in Risk Assessment & Management: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has published research into the involvement in risk assessment and management of mental health service users considered by professionals to pose a potential risk to other people. The research was carried out due to concerns that the voices of these service users are not being heard in research, policy or practice. The full report, *Living with risk: Mental health service user involvement in risk assessment and management* by Joan Langan and Vivien Lindow is published by the Policy Press (ISBN 1 86134 596 8, price £14.95). For more information visit www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialcare/414.asp*

From: East Forward, April/ May 2004

Improving the quality of the private rented sector

Shelter and BPF (British Property Federation) have jointly agreed to solutions to clean up the image and quality of private rented accommodation. Both organisations agree that there is a problem with a small minority of landlords providing sub-standard and unhealthy accommodation. In summary, Shelter's proposals for the Housing Bill are:

- *A new statutory code of practice for minimum management standards*
- *A new dispute resolution mechanism*
- *Provision of basic information to tenants and landlords on rights and responsibilities*
- *A tax allowance for small landlords to offset management input against rental income*

Summary of article in Property People, Issue 436.

ODPM announces success in reduction of B&B use for homeless families

The reduction of 99.3% in the number of families originally living in B&B accommodation for longer than 6 weeks from when the target was introduced two years ago is a huge improvement.

These reductions mean that 6,000 fewer children are accommodated in B&B hotels as a long term solution to their families' homelessness. The benefit for Local Authorities will be massive cost savings as B&Bs are the most expensive solution to homelessness and the Government has encouraged Local Authorities to redirect these savings into prevention work which includes mediation services, improved advice services and early intervention when families get into rent arrears or face nuisance complaints.

Jeff Rooker, Minister for Homelessness, said: 'Childhoods spent in B&B can have a

damaging impact on the health, education and the development of children, as they are often forced to spend time in cramped conditions with no space to play or do homework. Local authorities across the whole of England are now making reliance on B&B a thing of the past by preventing homelessness, finding better forms of accommodation, and pursuing innovative ways to offer families with children a better future.'

Adam Sampson, Director of Shelter, welcomed the achievement: 'Meeting the target is a massive achievement, which has benefited thousands of homeless families. This reduction in the number of families in B&B could not have been achieved without the target, the resources provided and the commitment of the Government and the local authorities to meet it.'

There are 380,000 Hidden Homeless People in Great Britain
Have You Seen a Homeless Person Recently?

Rad Monkey
From Bishopbridge House Charity gig

An evening of fun, laughter and great sounds that will include a showcase of comedy, live music, DJs, DJs, DJs, DJs & much more. We hope to raise awareness of homelessness and do some fund-raising too! with special guests:

The Nimmo Twins

Fruition The Miggs Revox The Human Beat Box DJ Tolly (live on TV)

Wednesday 16th June 2004
Norwich Art Centre, Saint Dunstons St, Norwich NR2 4PG
10pm - 11pm. Tickets £6 - £7 on the door

Bishopbridge House Exhibition @ The Forum

Enabling greater understanding of the issues relating to homelessness. A series of interesting and thought provoking exhibits. Providing homeless people with an opportunity to express their personal experiences and reflections.

Saturday 29th May 2004
The Forum, Bethel St, Norwich NR2 1TF

Diversity Works successful launch

The successful launch of the VHG Diversity Works! forum on the 6th May at the King's Centre heralds an innovative project for providers of support and accommodation in improving access to services. This project provides bi-monthly forums which are open to VHG members and partners and include drama, music, food and celebration as a less formal and more interactive development programme. The project is co-ordinated by Clare Pastorius.

The launch event was opened by MEP Richard Howitt who described how his personal experience of working at the front line with people with a learning disability inspired him to push the Diversity agenda forward at a European level. Delegates were then entertained by the drama 'Minority



Photography: Martin Figura



Retorts' performed by the Conical Theatre Group which took the audience on a humorous and lively tour of the impact of legislation and attitudes to equalities and diversity from the 1970s to the present day.

The next forum meeting will be held on 22nd June at the Broadland Housing Association venue The Elms, Unthank Road. This meeting will focus on the challenges of meeting the Supporting People QAF on Fair Access, Diversity and Inclusion.

To book your place please email training@vhg-east.org or telephone 01603 617299. This project is funded by the Lloyds TSB Foundation.

Launch of Regional Social Strategy

The East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) has launched the Regional Social Strategy. This strategy was developed in collaboration with over 300 stakeholders through events held throughout the region.

VHG participated in one of these workshops last year. The strategy sets out the vision, objectives and the means for achieving a fair and inclusive society in the East of England. The key challenge that the strategy hopes to meet is that of the increasing gap between the most prosperous and the most disadvantaged. They identify that within this region 25% of pensioners, 22% of children and 14% of working age adults are in households with incomes below the poverty threshold. The aim is to tackle this social

exclusion through a framework provided by this strategy.

The report is well designed and laid out with clear action planning at the back under each strategic objective. The Strategic Objectives of most interest to the VHG membership will be SO6 'To support the development of sustainable communities' and SO7 'To improve access to services, especially to disadvantaged groups'. The development of sustainable communities is the objective which covers housing which

incorporates decent standards and homelessness. Voluntary sector organisations and RSLs should be making efforts to influence the development of sub-regional housing strategies. Information on the sub-regional groups is held within the Regional Housing Strategy, and this will ensure that supported housing is included on the agenda. Strategic objective 7 is on first sight very transport issue oriented but this objective includes promotion of projects and services which provide rural outreach services for information and advice.

To order a copy of the Regional Social Strategy contact Laurna Compton, Social Policy Officer by email on laurna.compton@eera.gov.uk or telephone 01284 728151.

Training Dates

14th July 2004

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION
ANNE MCCRUDDEN
VENUE: AGE CONCERN NORFOLK**

21st July 2004

**CONFIDENTIALITY & DATA PROTECTION
CLARE PASTORIUS
VENUE: KING OF HEARTS**

8th September 2004

**WORKING WITH PSYCHOSIS
JANE WALLACE
VENUE: KING OF HEARTS**

15th September 2004

**MANAGING AGGRESSION & VIOLENCE
BOB BANHAM
VENUE: KING OF HEARTS**

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

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

VHG Networks/Events

22nd June 2004

DIVERSITY WORKS!

22nd June at the Broadland Housing Association venue The Elms, Unthank Road. This meeting will focus on the challenges of meeting the Supporting People QAF on Fair Access, Diversity and Inclusion.

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

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A day in the life of...

So I arrive at the train station at exactly the time my taxi was booked for, and I wonder about the collective power of every time I bemoaned the contract service taxi for being late. With the luxury

of spare minutes, I attempt to check my e-mail at a payphone internet service. Three telephones later and it seems there's a fault with their connection, and I consider briefly how my work days would function if the entire system went down permanently. I then consider if it's a learned trait of voluntary sector workers, or an individually nurtured ability, to analyse everything.

This is my first day working in Great Yarmouth, as Leeway takes over the running of the local refuge services. My first experience with Great Yarmouth some years ago culminated in a viciously verbal racial assault, and I am pleased that my latest encounter promises to be much more constructive. Gendered violence, racial violence, domestic violence, hate crimes - none deserve a place in our society and I am happy to be

part of an organisation whose purpose is to work towards the eradication of these ills whilst providing support and accommodation to women and children survivors.

**Yasmine Brien,
Refuge Team Leader
Leeway Norwich Women's Aid**

Leeway celebrates its 30th birthday this year, and as we take stock of our history and achievements it seems my work in Great Yarmouth is symbolic of the changes that the refuge movement as a whole has seen. Transforming a volunteer run collective into a professional Supporting People provider will be a challenge, but a necessary one to sustain and develop domestic violence services in Great Yarmouth. This is my mantra as I arrive at the refuge with my colleague preparing for a fortnight of rota-writing, health and safety checking, policy and procedure implementation, archiving, volunteer recruitment and training. But first, coffee.....



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