

Fight against homelessness becomes a key priority for the EU Social Inclusion Agenda

Third European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion: Tackling Homelessness emerges as a key priority in the Enlarged Europe. One of the eight final recommendations of the Round Table called for "the development and implementation of integrated strategies to combat homelessness" in the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion of the 25 Member States.

The flexibility of the Open Method of Coordination enables the EU to prioritise urgent social problems under the EU Social Inclusion Strategy – in this case homelessness - in accordance with emerging developments in the Member States.

The Third European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion took place in Rotterdam on 18 and 19 October under the Dutch Presidency. This annual conference reviews progress towards the social objectives of the Lisbon Agenda and looks for ways of strengthening and developing the EU strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion. To this end, it brings together all relevant actors in the area of social inclusion (national ministries, local and regional authorities, national service providers, European NGOs, representatives from the EU institutions) to work together and make recommendations. The conclusions are fed back into the European Social Council to become part of the EU Strategy priorities.

FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the homeless, is one of the main European NGO stakeholders in the field of social inclusion, and was present at the Round Table Conference as facilitator of the Workshop entitled "Accessibility for the most vulnerable – Strategies for the Prevention of Homelessness." The European Commission highlighted pressing problems that emerged in the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion 2004-2006 of the ten new member states. The need to combat homelessness and provide access to decent housing emerged across all of the EU10. The European Commission identified this as one of six key priorities for social inclusion policies in an enlarged EU.

The will to make concrete progress in the area of homelessness was reflected in the conclusion put forward by the Workshop on the prevention of homelessness to the final plenary session. It called for the inclusion of "the

development and implementation of integrated strategies to combat homelessness" in the NAPs of all 25 EU member states.

FEANTSA strongly supports this recommendation. It welcomes the exploitation of the huge learning potential offered by the NAPs and the EU Social Inclusion Strategy. At a time when most of the 25 EU member states are grappling with major problems related to housing and homelessness, policy exchange in this area across the EU could not be more timely. The preparation of targeted homeless strategies to combat and prevent homelessness in the NAPs will facilitate the development of creative approaches and stronger policies. Strategies to tackle and prevent homelessness are, by their very nature, multi-dimensional, embracing the sectors of social protection, housing, health and employment. The inclusion of such integrated strategies will help to ensure that a multi-dimensional approach to combating poverty becomes a feature of the NAPs. Finally, strategies to combat and prevent homelessness have the advantage of being very targeted which will allow the Open Method of Coordination maximum scope for positive impact, as targeted strategies have great potential for comparison and transferability to other national contexts in the framework of the OMC.

In closing the conference, Dutch State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment, Mr H. Van Hoof, expressed his commitment to working towards the prevention of homelessness and to helping homeless people towards reintegration. He also stated his determination to bring the conclusions of the Round Table to the European Social Council. FEANTSA calls on the Council to take action on this basis and to make strategies to tackle and prevent homelessness an integral part of the NAPs in 2006.

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OPDM appoints new head of Homelessness Implementation

Lisa Barker has been appointed the new Head of the Homelessness Implementation Division at the Office Deputy Prime Minister, working in its Homelessness and Housing Support directorate.

Ms Barker was formerly on secondment from Leicester City Council to the Homelessness and Housing Support directorate.

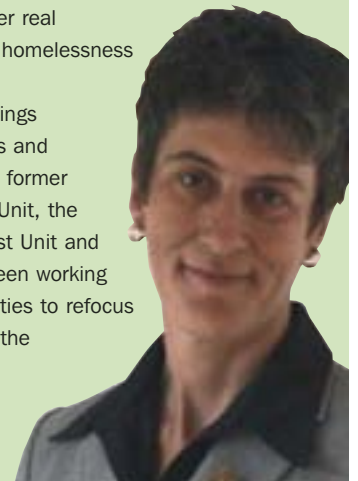
She said: "I am delighted to have this wonderful opportunity to tackle homelessness and deliver real improvements in homelessness services from the heart of government."

Ms Barker has a strong track record in frontline work tackling homelessness; developing Leicester's rough sleeping strategy and managing key homelessness services as Head of Hostels and Housing Community Services.

Leicester City Council achieved Beacon status on tackling homelessness under her management.

She will now head the new Implementation Division to take forward ODPM's work with local authorities, the voluntary sector and other statutory agencies to deliver real improvements in homelessness services.

The Division brings together the skills and knowledge of the former Rough Sleepers' Unit, the Bed and Breakfast Unit and staff who have been working with local authorities to refocus their services on the prevention of homelessness.



Julian Housing Opens More Doors!

Devonshire Place is an Exciting new development of 20 supported flats owned by Cotman Housing Association and managed by Julian Housing Support. The scheme is the first to have been developed in conjunction with the Greater Norwich Housing Partnership.

Situated in Norwich, close to the facilities on and around Dereham Road, the scheme will provide high quality, longer-term accommodation to vulnerable adults with a history of severe and enduring mental health problems. Julian Housing staff will provide 24-hour support. Residents of the scheme will be granted assured tenancies with Cotman Housing Association and there will be no time limit on the length of stay – a rare thing in supported housing schemes.

Devonshire Place is open to people who are eligible for housing in either Norwich, Broadland or South Norfolk. Applicants must be referred by a member of a Community Mental Health team in one of those areas. All flats are self-contained and comprise of a living room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. There are also 2 purpose-built disabled flats. In addition to their own living space, tenants will be able to use a communal lounge, gardens and guest rooms.

The scheme was developed in response to needs expressed in various housing surveys carried out by Julian Housing Support and is based on the model of Bakery Court. Bakery Court has been open since November 1998 and is also staffed around the clock. This scheme is owned by Norwich Consolidated Charities and again, managed by Julian Housing Support.

Devonshire Place has cost around £1.6M to build. This money was provided by the Housing Corporation. The day-to-day running costs of the scheme will be met by a mixture of Health, Social Services and Supporting People funding. The basic weekly rent will be eligible for housing benefit. The building is due to be completed in late January 2005 with tenants moving in soon afterwards.

Bakery Court

Devonshire Place has been modeled on Bakery Court in Norwich.

Residents here have been supported to build their own community and engage in a variety of things (voluntary work, education courses, socializing

etc.) There are many positive examples of how this secure accommodation has helped individuals to re-build their lives. For some there has been a dramatic reduction in the need for hospital admission, others have experienced a better quality of life leading to greater self-esteem and success in achieving personal goals.

Both schemes are groundbreaking in that unlike traditional models of support, tenants retain responsibility for their day-to-day affairs including managing their money, shopping for & preparing their own food etc. Support is provided if necessary but the focus is on enabling individuals to do things for themselves, building upon strengths and helping people realise what they have to offer the community.

Community

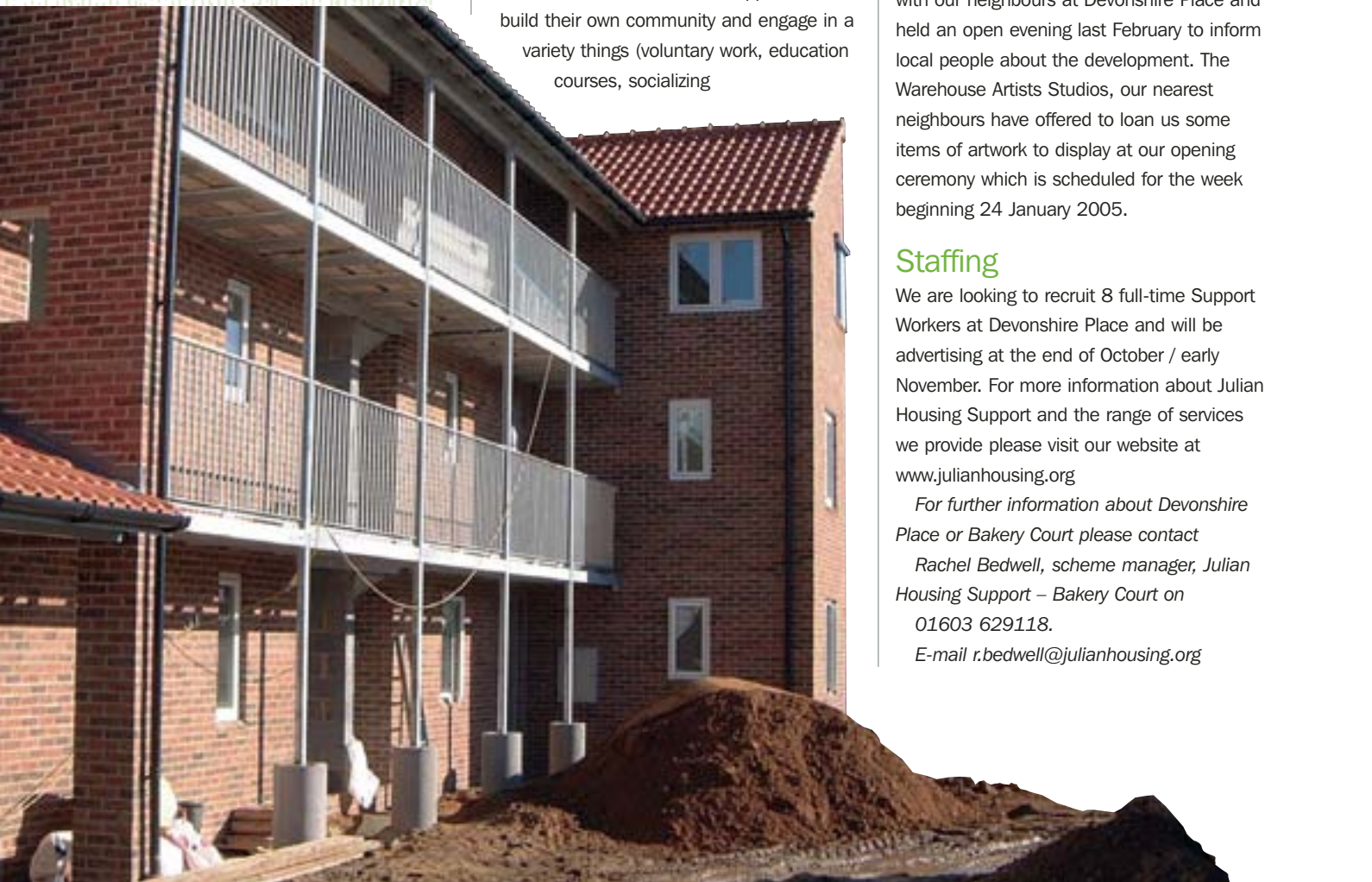
Being part of a community is important to all of us. Julian Housing encourages individuals to become involved in ordinary community activities and opportunities rather than focusing solely on specific mental health resources.

At Bakery Court our neighbours are very supportive. We are also keen to build links with our neighbours at Devonshire Place and held an open evening last February to inform local people about the development. The Warehouse Artists Studios, our nearest neighbours have offered to loan us some items of artwork to display at our opening ceremony which is scheduled for the week beginning 24 January 2005.

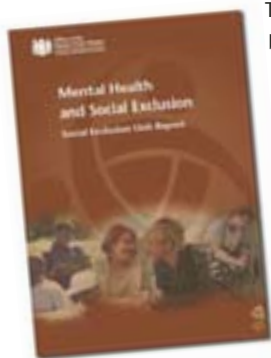
Staffing

We are looking to recruit 8 full-time Support Workers at Devonshire Place and will be advertising at the end of October / early November. For more information about Julian Housing Support and the range of services we provide please visit our website at www.julianhousing.org

For further information about Devonshire Place or Bakery Court please contact Rachel Bedwell, scheme manager, Julian Housing Support – Bakery Court on 01603 629118. E-mail r.bedwell@julianhousing.org



New government drive to end mental health stigma



The report published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Social Exclusion Unit, outlines how for the first time, action will be taken to address the full range of issues affecting people with mental health

problems, rather than focusing solely on medical needs.

Jeff Rooker, Minister for Social Exclusion, said: "One in six adults suffer from common mental health problems, such as depression or anxiety, at any time. Yet this report shows people with mental health problems are one of the most socially excluded groups. Too often, they do not have the support they need to participate fully in society, yet we know that employment and community activities are important in promoting both mental and physical wellbeing. That's why we're taking action to increase opportunities, particularly in employment, but also addressing housing, education, family needs and community participation. Many people with mental health problems do want to work, yet fewer than a quarter actually do. They are nearly three times as likely to be in debt and are more likely to live alone and in poorly maintained accommodation. The Government is determined to address these inequalities."

Health Minister Rosie Winterton said: "From speaking to people with mental health problems throughout the country I know how vital it is that they are properly supported to gain or retain employment and access education, advice on finances, legal rights and other community facilities and appropriate health and social care services. We are working across government with all departments, and also with businesses and the voluntary and community sector to help promote a positive culture in relation to mental health. Our aim is to ensure that people with mental health problems can get access to ordinary mainstream opportunities."

'Mental Health and Social Exclusion' - summary of report action plan

The agreed action points from the report falls into six categories:

Stigma and discrimination

- a sustained programme to challenge discrimination against people with mental health problems to be launched next week, better co-ordinated across government and the voluntary sector;
- analyse Ofcom's complaints data on broadcast media coverage of mental health and raise

awareness of how people can make complaints about stigmatising or inaccurate portrayals and reporting.

- practical teaching resources to challenge stigma around mental health;
- promoting best practice in the public sector.

The role of health and social care services in tackling social exclusion

- implementing evidence-based practice on employment, working towards an employment adviser for everyone with severe mental health problems;
- improved access in primary care to advice on employment and community activities;
- redesigning mental health day services to promote inclusion;
- strengthened training on social inclusion for health and social care staff;
- working with the criminal justice system and the police on mental health issues.

Employment

- improved training on mental health issues for Jobcentre Plus staff;
- support for those interested in enterprise and self-employment;
- clarifying benefit rules for people wanting to return to work;
- improved support for employers and job retention.

Supporting families and community participation

- targeted family support for parents with mental health problems and their children;
- improved support to access education and training opportunities;
- removal of unnecessary barriers to community roles such as jury service.

Getting the basics right

- new guidance to housing authorities on lettings and stability;
- improved access to financial and legal advice, and affordable transport.

Making it happen

- a cross-government team to drive implementation, overseen by Ministers;
- an independent advisory group to advise the government on progress and publish an annual report;
- local implementation led jointly by primary care trusts and local authorities;
- better use of the expertise in the voluntary and community sector.

The guide 'Action on Mental Health' was published on the 11th October 2004. Download the report from the SEU website – www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk The report is also available in summary and easy-to-read formats. You can order copies by contacting our publications helpline on 0870 1226 236. You can also also download them from this site.

News in Brief

Involving Service Users

The Norfolk based mental health organisation ISU (Involving Service Users) is now managed by a consortium lead by Meridian East. Please note that the email address for the project has also changed to isu.norfolk@netcom.co.uk

Revising the Regional Housing Strategy

The East of England Regional Assembly is holding a series of consultation events on the Regional Housing Strategy. These will be held on 16th November in Peterborough, 25th November in Norwich and 3rd December in Luton. For further information or to book please contact Sue Holder on 01284 729421 or email sue.holder@eera.gov.uk

VHG Diversity Works Festive Forum

Please note that the festive forum will be held on the 21st December 1- 4pm. If you would like to receive an invitation please contact Suzie Townsend. Email suzie@vhg-east.org or telephone 01603 617299.

Guidance on safe storage of medications for hostels

Kevin Flemen, former Director of Release, has made his latest briefing on the Safe Storage of medications available online on his website www.ixion.demon.co.uk/Resources.htm

DoH urges PCTs to get involved in Supporting People

The Department of Health has written to all PCT Chief Executives reminding them of the importance of the Supporting People programme and encouraging them to ensure that they engage locally with the programme, including through the Commissioning Body. A copy of the letter can be found on the DoH website. Find a link to this letter on www.spkweb.org.uk

New Holmes on Housing Corporation's Board

Chris Holmes, former director of Shelter, has been appointed as a board member for the Housing Corporation. The announcement was made on the 27th October by the ODPM. Housing Minister Keith Hill, said the new appointments added considerable experience to the Board. "Chris Holmes has a strong breadth and depth of knowledge and experience in social housing, regeneration, community development and local authorities."

Training Dates

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY
24th Nov '04,
KING OF HEARTS NORWICH
RICHARD HANNY
COST -£75 (MEMBERS)

INTRODUCING DIVERSITY
24th Nov '04,
KINGS LYNN - CLARE PASTORIUS
COST - £50 PER DELEGATE

INTRODUCING DIVERSITY
15th Dec '04,
LOWESTOFT - CLARE PASTORIUS
COST -£50 PER DELEGATE

Meetings

DIVERSITY WORKS
(SUITABLE FOR ALL MEMBERS)
VENUE – TBC
Date – 21st Dec '04 1- 4pm

FOCUS ON THE FUTURE FORUM
(SUITABLE FOR SENIOR MANAGERS AND
CEOS)
VENUE – IPSWICH YMCA
Date - 15th Dec '04 10 - 12noon

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

EMAIL THE TEAM -
Emma Daniel, Chief Executive
emma@vhg-east.org

Anne Stolworthy, Administration & Finance
anne@vhg-east.org

Emmalouise Ward, Researcher
emmalouise@vhg-east.org

Andy Baker, Information Assistant
andy@vhg-east.org

Suzie Townshend, Office Assistant
suzie@vhg-east.org

Regional Assembly approves 478,000 new homes for the East

The East of England Regional Assembly approved The East of England Plan (formerly known as the Regional Spatial Strategy 14), which guides planning and development in the region to 2021.

A majority vote from Assembly members during the meeting, held at the Civic Centre in Southend-on-Sea, approved the Plan for submission to Government and endorsed the recommendations made by the Regional Planning Panel at its meeting on 15 October 2004.

The East of England Plan makes many proposals to contribute to the quality of life and work in the region including housing, economic development, the environment, infrastructure and transport. Key proposals include:

- Planning for up to 379,000 new jobs across the East of England up to 2021, to meet future economic growth needs and in particular to meet the regeneration needs of less prosperous areas;
- Provision of 478,000 new homes by 2021 (nearly 60,000 have already been built since 2001 and, of the balance, more than half already have planning permission or are allocated in existing development plans).
- Rejection of the additional 18,000 homes requested by the Government.
- Rejection of a second runway at Stansted Airport.
- Commitment to an early focused review of the East of England Plan. This will ensure that once Government reveals any additional infrastructure funding consideration can be given to whether a major new settlement is required to meet growth needs beyond 2021. It will also reassess the region's longer-term needs and economic development.

■ A major increase – more than doubling – of the supply of social rented, key worker, and other forms of affordable housing, to address housing shortages in the region.

■ Proposals for more sustainable forms of transport, seeking to reduce the rate of growth in car and lorry traffic and promote public transport, walking, and cycling.

■ An extensive package of proposals for environmental and social measures, such as more energy/water efficient development, investment in education, skills training and health services, and cultural and recreation development.

Sue Sida-Lockett, Chair of the Assembly said, "This is a momentous day for the Assembly. This Plan is aimed at improving the quality of life for everyone who lives in, works in, or visits the region. It is particularly important for our young people and children, as they seek to gain access to jobs, housing, recreation, and services in the region.

The Assembly eagerly awaits the Government's decision on our £1.5 billion bid for investment in infrastructure to support this economic growth. Unless the Government recognises these needs it will be difficult to deliver these benefits.

The East of England Plan will be submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and a 14-week public consultation period will be launched on 8 December at Ely Maltings.

The Public Consultation will include a range of public meetings and events around the region, mostly during January, followed by an Examination-in-Public (EIP) before an independent panel, appointed by the Secretary of State, due to start on 13 September, 2005.

Local Housing Allowance a threat not a benefit warns Shelter

The Local Housing Allowance offers private tenants a fixed weekly allowance to spend on rent. Any savings they can keep. Benefits are paid according to the type of property they are entitled to rather than the property that they are actually renting. i.e. Someone entitled to a 3 bed property who is living in a 2 bed flat will get paid local index rent for a 3 bed property rather than housing benefit allowance for their current accommodation. This gives an incentive for people to access accommodation which has less room than they need and has some benefits but there are also some pitfalls

to this scheme in terms of the national budget and unscrupulous landlords.

Shelter warns that the severe shortage of social housing in many areas does not allow tenants the choice, in where they live, needed to make this scheme work. It also says the plan would further reduce choice by making many of the new developments on mixed tenure estates - where rents tend to be higher - unviable for homeless families and those on low incomes.

Ben Jackson, Director of Communication and Campaigns at Shelter, says:

"We need a better way of supporting the poorest and most vulnerable tenants as Housing Benefit is not working. It is damaging people's lives, forcing them into bad housing and making people homeless. But ideas like the local housing allowance could prove disastrous if extended to social tenants.

"The truth is, most people moving into council or housing association homes will have very little choice about where they live no matter how they pay their rent. This kind of scheme could make people poorer and effectively bar them from many new homes."

VHG

1st Floor 36 St. Giles Street, Norwich NR2 1LL
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