

## Homeless lose out under choice-based social housing lettings

The Government drive to boost choice for council tenants marginalising vulnerable and homeless, says Shelter. The government drive to boost choice for social housing tenants risks further marginalising homeless households, according to a new report released today by housing and homelessness charity Shelter.

A question of choice: issues and good practice in choice-based lettings warns that choice-based lettings (CBL), the system where social landlords advertise properties and applicants make bids for homes, can act against the interests of the people in most urgent housing need.

Homeless applicants have less choice than others, are forced to bid more often or more quickly for properties, and many are likely to end up being housed in low-demand areas. As CBL develops into regional and sub regional schemes, the danger of homeless households being pushed into low demand areas risks becoming a regional problem at real cost to individuals and communities.

The report, which is based on investigations of local authorities piloting CBL ahead of a nationwide roll-out by 2010, warns the new regime is promising what it cannot deliver in the context of the massive excess of demand over supply for social housing.

However, perceptions of how social housing is allocated have improved under CBL. Applicants on the housing waiting list, local politicians and council members, describe CBL as fairer and more transparent than the bureaucratic allocations system.

Using the internet to view properties and make bids with quick responses has improved the image of social housing whilst freeing-up staff, who previously grappled with appeals against allocations, to boost customer service.

Authorities were able to adapt faster to changing demand across their housing stock to respond to specific needs. It is this flexibility and willingness to adapt systems as new information emerges that means CBL could be improved to meet the needs of the homeless and vulnerable better than it is currently doing. Key good practice recommendations include improving initial contact with applicants through telephone or personal visits rather than forms sent by post or online, a broader definition of vulnerability and removing barriers such as time limits on priority status for homeless households.

Shelter director Adam Sampson said: "While greater choice has to be welcomed in principle, when there is a chronic housing shortage it is a hollow concept. Vulnerable sections of the community and homeless people need to be housed near vital support networks of family and friends. Choice-based lettings should be making this easier but is instead being used to shift priorities in

favour of low-need households in the name of sustainable communities. The risk is that we could be actually creating less sustainable communities by excluding homeless households from high demand properties and instead funnelling them into the areas where no-one else wants to live."



sponsored by



## VHG & Homeless Link Change Up for Regional Expansion

VHG is the regional network for providers of support and accommodation and has entered into a formal arrangement with our national sister organisation Homeless Link in order to promote network opportunities in this region for hostel providers. The contract which enables VHG to draw on national 'Change Up' funding via Homeless Link will provide VHG with a new full time Regional Network Co-ordinator until at least March 2006.

This post holder will focus primarily on working in areas in the west of the region such as Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire to engage with providers of homelessness services, facilitate networking, training and representation. The intention is to work with existing networking groups and meeting groups in order to add value to what already exists. For further information or to arrange a meeting with the Regional Co-ordinator please email [emma@vhg-east.org](mailto:emma@vhg-east.org)

## News in Brief

### The Woodward Charitable Trust

*These grants are awarded across the UK and applications are considered twice annually. There are three main types of grants awarded: major grants, small grants and children's summer scheme grants. The areas of interest are: homelessness, especially affecting women, refugee groups and covering facilities such as women's refuges; prisons and prisoners; travellers; exclusion elements and preventative programmes; arts outreach work by local groups, particularly in fields which do not attract funding from other Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts. Trustees may also consider disability projects, environmental projects. Full details from [www.woodwardcharitabletrust.org.uk](http://www.woodwardcharitabletrust.org.uk).*

### VHG Administrator Moves to Stationery!

*Anne Stolworthy, VHG's Administration Officer, is moving on to work for The Stationery Office in August. Anne has been a valued and enthusiastic member of the team for two years and I know members will miss her and wish her the best of luck in her new post. For finance enquires please now contact Joan on 01603 617299 or email [joan@vhg-east.org](mailto:joan@vhg-east.org)*

### SORP Changes for Charity Annual Reports

*All charities will need to be aware of changes relating to the SORP for accounting periods from 1st April 2005 onwards. Full information can be found at the Charity Commission's website [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk) The key changes relate to the Trustees' Annual Report and enforces the need for clearer narrative explanation of the position of the charity. A full article on this issue is found in the July 2005 issue of the SITRA Bulletin. Contact SITRA for further information – [www.sitra.org.uk](http://www.sitra.org.uk) For a free toolkit which helps report to the new SORP guidelines called 'Reporting Achievement & Performance for Charities' contact Kingston Smith on 020 7566 3573 or visit [www.kingston-smith.co.uk/toolkit](http://www.kingston-smith.co.uk/toolkit)*

# Focus on - Governance

There are many new resources available for charities to promote good governance. The focus on governance is timely for many of our members who have increased pressure from funders to bring about rapid organisational change.

Funding opportunities are increasingly dependent on formal partnership and the agenda of the market management technique as has been demonstrated previously by the experience of the Housing Associations is about joint delivery for greater efficiency through mergers, partnerships, and consortium working.

This environment calls for trustees who are equipped to do the job. Often, boards of charitable organisations are too small and lack diversity, and organisations are going to need to get their sleeves rolled up to rigorously recruit and induct new trustees.

The best resource is your local CVS organisation who will be able to support you in governance issues. Many are establishing networks and support specifically aimed at trustees. Encouragement for your trustees to get involved in one of these groups is a great first step to improvement.

The sectors code of Governance which has been developed with the Charity Commission will be an important tool which your trustees must be made aware of and trained in. This will be published during July 2005 but was not available as Raising the Roof went to press.

## New National Governance Hub

The Governance Hub, one of six national hubs of expertise that form part of the Government's ChangeUp programme, has today received official go-ahead from the Home Office. The Hub has already begun recruiting a staff team and a chair.

The Hub – a partnership of eight voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisations – will lead on and facilitate initiatives to improve the governance of voluntary and community organisations in England at a national, regional and local level. Its main functions will be:

- to support the sector's 750,000 trustees and hundreds of thousands of committee members by offering ways to enhance their skills and knowledge

- encourage more people from across diverse communities and outside of the sector to become trustees – promoting it as a valuable part of active citizenship

- increase the governance capacity of organisations

Ben Kernighan, Director of Services and Development at the Hub's Accountable Body NCVO, said:

"Governance is at the heart of the voluntary and community sector and the sector's health, vitality and probity depend on it. This new partnership brings together a wealth of expertise from across the country and will make a real difference to governance throughout the sector."

Jeremy Crook, Director, Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) – a member of the Governance Hub partnership – said:

"Many VCS organisations need support to strengthen their governance capacity. The Governance Hub will provide a practical, accessible resource that will reach out to the whole sector, including to black and minority ethnic organisations and to those organisations not currently accessing governance support. To do this we want the Hub to work in partnership with existing infrastructure bodies and build on existing good practice in the sector."

By September, the Hub partnership aims to:

- have promoted the hub's programme of work at meetings in all nine regions of the country

- promoted the new Code of Governance across the sector

- developed a website

- commissioned a base line study to measure governance activity

- recruited a permanent staff team.

The Hub's business plan and further information can be found on the website [www.governancehub.org.uk](http://www.governancehub.org.uk)



# Solo Housing celebrates 20 years!

20 years ago, an organisation was formed by a group of volunteers concerned about the plight of single homeless people. COSH, as it was then, became Solo Housing (East Anglia) Ltd and it is still continuing its valuable work of placing single people in affordable housing, working in partnership with South Norfolk, Broadland, Breckland and Babergh District Councils, and Norwich City Council.

Solo has two teams: supported housing, with properties in Diss, Dereham, Thetford, Sudbury and Glemsford; and the homelessness prevention team which runs a lodgings scheme matching tenants with landlords and landladies, and offering free support and advice to both parties.

“Without Solo’s help I wouldn’t even have considered letting my room. They did the work of finding someone suitable and provided the system and support” (J, landlady)

“The District council put me onto Solo, and finding accommodation was quick and easy and the staff helpful. I’m saving for my own place but lodgings has provided a useful stop gap” (C, tenant)

Last year Solo dealt with over 600 referrals, with a placement rate of about 10%. Many of those not placed were helped to find their own solutions to their housing problems through advice, or referrals to specialist support agencies.

There is an increasing problem of benefit claimants being unable to find accommodation, thus perpetuating the vicious cycle of not being able to find work because of having no address, and not being able to get accommodation because of no job. “Trying to find new landlords/ladies and persuade them to take a tenant who is on benefit is one of our key roles”, says Jen Lerner, Senior Homelessness Prevention Officer with Solo. “It is hoped that the new Local Housing Allowance pilot schemes being run by South Norfolk District, and Norwich City Councils will help to address this, by offering a fixed rate and a quicker response time than housing benefit”.

Another growing problem is where people become homeless following a relationship breakdown and need to maintain their access to their children by having them to stay overnight. Older people are also increasingly finding themselves homeless following job loss or break up of the family home, with the added

complications that that brings.

“Without Solo (or Cosh as it then was) I would have had difficulty finding accommodation. Through the voluntary work I did for them I found employment in housing. Several years on I sit at my desk at

“Without Solo’s help I wouldn’t even have considered letting my room. They did the work of finding someone suitable and provided the system and support”

South Norfolk Council and see that they continue to help and support many of those who are in the position I was in. I also see a professional service without which the people of Norfolk would be poorer”. (Homelessness Advisory Officer).

For more information, contact Solo Housing at 12a St Nicholas Street, Diss, Norfolk IP22 4LB. Tel: 01379 640250. Email: [info@solohousing.org](mailto:info@solohousing.org)



## VHG Regional Conference 25th & 26th October 2005

We have set the date for this year’s annual regional conference which will be held in Peterborough. Please set these dates aside in your diary for a conference which will be bigger and better than ever! To reserve a place for a delegate or for display stands please email [suzie@vhg-east.org](mailto:suzie@vhg-east.org)

## The Essential Trustee

Responding to concerns from trustees, one of the Charity Commission’s strategic review outcomes is to clearly separate guidance for charities about what they ‘must do’ according to legal requirements, from what they ‘should do’ to meet best practice.

June sees the launch of the booklet ‘The Essential Trustee’ (CC3), which looks at the duties of charity trustees. The guidance clearly differentiates between the ‘musts’ and ‘shoulds’.

The booklet replaces the March 2002 version of CC3 ‘Responsibilities of charity

trustees’. It sets out trustee duties and looks at a selection of questions that new or existing trustees might ask about their duties, giving a concise summary answer and then giving more background.

Even if you are familiar with the earlier version, please take the time to read the new version as a way of refreshing your knowledge of trustee responsibilities. ‘The Essential Trustee’ is available on the website [www.charity-commission.gov.uk](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk) or from the contact centre on 0870 333 0123.

# Training 2005

## Working with People who self-injure,

23rd September

This course aims to develop participants understanding of the reasons for self-injury and improve knowledge about the interventions that self-harmers find useful. Participants will also be given the opportunity to reflect on their own feelings and practice relating to self-injury.

## Loss & Bereavement,

5th October

The course has been developed to increase understanding and awareness of the way in which change, loss of life traumas such as death, illness or divorce can affect individuals and those who support them. This will enable participants to be more effective in supporting others experiencing change, loss or trauma.

## Lone Worker Personal Safety,

26th October

This course is an introduction to personal safety for those at work. It is intended to raise awareness of the issues and highlight particular workplace related problems for individual participants. It encourages a positive problem-solving approach to minimising risk. **COURSE FULL – REGISTER INTEREST FOR NEXT COURSE ONLY**

## Counselling Skills,

16th November

An introduction to counselling skills for all those working directly with clients and colleagues. Learning outcomes include:

Improve listening skills and communicate better with service users and colleagues

Identify your strengths and weaknesses as a listener and reflect on your own practice

Develop your ability to relate with empathy and respect and empower and support the people you are working with

## Motivational Interviewing,

30th November

An introduction to the skills required for supporting and motivating service users and clients who want to make changes to their lives. We will explore ways of working to release the potential for change that we all possess and facilitate that change in an affirming and supportive way. The course will cover:

Stages in the change process

Building motivation

Setting clear, reachable goals

Recognising barriers to change

Managing resistance and ambivalence

Working with people to help them make changes in their lives

FOR A COPY OF OUR 2005 TRAINING BROCHURE PLEASE PHONE 01603 617299 OR EMAIL [suzie@vhg-east.org](mailto:suzie@vhg-east.org)

### Email the Team:

Emma Daniel, Chief Executive  
[emma@vhg-east.org](mailto:emma@vhg-east.org)

Joan Kinning-Smith,  
Interim Administration Officer  
[joan@vhg-east.org](mailto:joan@vhg-east.org)

Andy Baker, Information Assistant  
[andy@vhg-east.org](mailto:andy@vhg-east.org)

Suzie Townsend, Office Assistant  
[suzie@vhg-east.org](mailto:suzie@vhg-east.org)

VHG

Promoting Social Inclusion in the East of England | raising the roof

Working for providers of accommodation and support

## EERA Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation: Assessment & Provision Conference 7th September 2005

The East of England has the largest population of gypsy travellers in the country. They also have some of the best practice in delivering mainstream services to the community. This conference will cover the following issues:

- Strategic approaches to assessment and provision of accommodation
- Site provision and dealing with unauthorised sites
- Engagement, consultation and addressing diverse views and expectations
- Tackling a hostile media, the concerns of settled communities and nimbysm
- Examine cases of good practice with peers
- Identify key messages and action points for local policy makers and service managers

To book contact Sue Houlder, Conference Organiser, East of England Regional Assembly, Flempton House, Flempton, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP28 6EG. Tel: 01284 729421, Fax: 01284 729429, email: [sue.houlder@eera.gov.uk](mailto:sue.houlder@eera.gov.uk)



VHG

1st Floor 36 St. Giles Street, Norwich NR2 1LL  
Tel: 01603 617299 Fax: 01603 621521  
Company Limited by Guarantee No. 3384777  
Charity Reg No. 1063142

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

BROADLAND HOUSING  
ARE PROUD TO SUPPORT THE WORK OF LOCAL HOSTELS  
FOR FURTHER INFO:  
01603 750200