

Tees Valley Preventing Offender Accommodation Loss Project: Learning and Good Practice Summary Brief

The Tees Valley Preventing Offender Accommodation Loss (POAL) Project was established after a successful bid for funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Funding was confirmed in July 2008 to set up a sub-regional partnership between Middlesbrough Council (lead organisation), Stockton Council, Redcar and Cleveland Council, Darlington Council and Hartlepool Council, their partner landlords and the prison and probation service. Funding was provided to establish a demonstrator project for female offenders on remand or serving a sentence at HMP/YOI Low Newton and returning to the Tees Valley area. The project became operational in February 2009 at HMP/YOI Low Newton, being extended to include HMP Holme House in March 2010.

The project has demonstrated ways of working between Local Authorities, Housing Providers and local Prisons that can reduce the loss of settled accommodation where appropriate, or end the tenancy where needed. This approach has been successful in dealing with specific tenancy support issues that can be dealt with in a front ended approach, and preventing the export of more urgent housing needs among offenders who are single homeless and or/ rough sleepers, who have been released from prisons both on a planned or unplanned basis, to local authority homeless teams, or Probation or Police to deal with.

The project uses a range of support methods to assist offenders on shorter term sentences by:

- Maintaining tenancies, through use of housing benefit regulations, or by the agreement with the housing provider, to ensure the accommodation is preserved for their release
- Terminating tenancies, where appropriate, which mitigates any unnecessary rent arrears or tenancy related costs such as rechargeable repairs from being incurred and anxiety.
- Developing local agreements and systems for accessing new tenancies upon discharge, where a previous tenancy has had to be terminated.
- Carrying out work to address the barriers that limit the client's access to accommodation on release.

This service is not presently provided within the current Housing, Finance and Debt service operated by Shelter, but dovetail with that service have been established to ensure the appropriate assistance is given to offenders at the relevant stage of their sentence. Traditional based prison resettlement projects are focussed upon the back end of a sentence, namely securing accommodation for release; they are thus manifestly a reactive service.

The accommodation strategy for offenders under the Reducing Re-Offending National Plan recognised the importance of key tasks during and soon after the induction process in preserving, closing down or transferring existing tenancies. There was a recognition that this work was essential in securing improvements in the accommodation outcomes that are sustainable, and contribute to reducing the risk of re-offending and harm to the public.

We wish to explore how POAL's successful approach, which is based upon flexibility and ensuring that the tasks required to preserve or properly close a tenancy are completed in each case, is a pragmatic approach to taking forward the principles of the HARP protocol and how the project has assisted in preventing single homelessness and rough sleeping. A tenacious, problem solving standpoint is taken to the more difficult cases that might result in wider repercussions if the offender is not assisted with their accommodation in a timely manner, for instance, offenders deemed to be Prolific Priority Offenders, or those who are subject to Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements. The officers work for the best possible outcome for

the individual in terms of maintaining their accommodation or where necessary relinquishing it and try to think creatively round problems and barriers.

The research will:

- capture the key lessons learned from the Tees Valley project, incorporating the recommendations of the ANEC Improving Housing Outcomes for Offenders report in service delivery
- explore how tenacity, practical problem solving and communication which keeps the client and landlord central to the process is essential to tenancy preservation or effective tenancy closure
- provide a practical guide to the joined up approach that could be adopted region wide between prisons and housing organisations
- provide guidance and support on the benefit pitfalls to be avoided, and the tenancy compliance issues that all parties need to be aware of
- demonstrate how the project can contribute to both reducing homeless and reoffending through short term intensive intervention support and liaison work
- demonstrate the collateral benefits that can be gained by tackling homelessness amongst offenders, such as reducing demand on other overstretched demand led public services
- enable a business case for commissioning of a wider regional POAL service

The research would be produced by the POAL Development Officer upon cessation of the operational service, and it is estimated that it would take approximately 3 months to complete. The costings for the research to be produced is as follows:

Basic Salary for POAL Officer	1975.67
Pension	444.00
NI	203.06
Essential Car user	80.25
Mileage	90.00
Mobile Phone	13.22
Sub Total	2806.20
Salary costs x 3 months)	8418.60
Contingency Amount for training materials/ awareness raising activities	1500.00
TOTAL REQUIRED FOR POAL RESEARCH	9918.60

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