

## **HOUSING OF OFFENDERS IN STOCKTON-ON-TEES**

### **1. Background**

The Housing Options Service fulfils the Local Authority's statutory responsibilities in respect of homelessness and homelessness prevention by embracing the enhanced housing options approach to service delivery.

It is a vital resource that is accessed by thousands of customers per year. It is well equipped to respond to customers who are homeless, threatened with homelessness or are potentially excluded from accessing their own accommodation.

In Stockton we have adopted a very proactive approach in our response to meeting the housing needs of offenders and this has led to the development of services somewhat unique to this Borough that demonstrate excellent partnership working.

### **2. Enhanced Housing Options Officer (EHO) – Alcohol and Substance Misuse**

Funded secured by the DAAT for 2 years. Project ends December this year.

This project allows the Housing Options Service to respond positively to the customers who are not normally eligible for any assistance from the authority but we know that without support and intervention their situation would likely worsen to the point that they would access services in crisis. All customers who access the Housing Options Service with a substance or alcohol misuse issue who are in housing need, are referred to the project and assistance is given as long as the customer engages with DAAT services.

To maximise the effectiveness of the project all DAAT commissioned services across the Borough were contacted to introduce and promote the new project but also to create mutually benefitting working relationships.

Following these visits and subsequent discussions with the service providers we have identified what they believe to be the key accommodation issues for their clients; offered to hold in-house surgeries and introduced a robust referral process for clients in need of accommodation – whether planned or in crisis.

The Officer currently provides regular surgeries at the Addictive Behaviour Service and the Criminal Justice Intervention Team and works in the Probation Service one day a week as well as visiting prison to interview prisoners within the IOM system to address barriers to accessing accommodation on release. There is also a referral process to our officer via CRI for any offender leaving prison to Stockton who is homeless on release.

To ensure consistency and promote robust multi-agency partnership the officer attends and contributes to the PPO and HCC conferences; Tier 4 panel meetings to discuss Rehab funding; Recovery Meetings with Addictive Behaviour Service, Lifeline, Probation and CRI; Working Girls Meetings.

The officer also assesses all clients seeking accommodation in the Trainer Flats.

Between January 2011 and January 2012 the Officer has worked with 232 customers - 148 housing advice cases and 84 homeless cases  
a case study is attached at appendix 1

### **3. Trainer Flats**

The EHO Alcohol and Substance Misuse service has benefitted from the added value provided by the 'Trainer Flats' scheme operated by the Housing Options Service. These apartments are fully furnished to a high specification and provide a unique opportunity for customers to demonstrate their commitment to modifying their behaviour, engaging with rehabilitation services and successfully reintegrating into the community in their own accommodation.

2 Interim Accommodation Officers are employed in the Housing Options Service to undertake the landlord function for the flats so that the properties are maximised as a resource. The officers also ensure that high standards of accommodation are provided and licence obligations are strictly adhered to. This is essential to ensure the sustainability of the scheme.

The flats are aspired to by many and have proved that they are an essential rung on the ladder towards independent living for some of our most excluded customers.

There are currently 15 flats, all located in one accommodation block.

4 are accessed by the Persistent and Prolific Offenders (PPO's) Team  
3 are accessed by the High Crime Causers (HCC's) Team  
1 for the Approved Premises 'move on' scheme  
7 are accessed by our EHO Substance and Alcohol service

Most of these customers would be unable to access social housing without this project and would inevitably drift towards the poorest of private rented housing in some of the most deprived areas in the Borough. This is far from conducive to reducing reoffending. Due to their location the apartments are able to maximise the resources of support providers and customers receive intensive support and management from not only the referring agency but from Stonham floating support service which we have secured additional Supporting people funding to increase its capacity.

Regular progress and monitoring meetings take place between the DAAT, Integrated Offender Management Team to discuss individual customers. These have been particularly beneficial and have ensured that the project continually develops and is fit for purpose. For instance it soon became apparent that a number of customers with a housing need were not engaging with structured day-care services, as requested so we are developing a "contract of engagement" whereby the customer will only receive our enhanced housing service if they are committed to engagement with the treatment and structured day-care services.

### **4. Outcomes**

Between January 2011 and January 2012, 38 customers have been accommodated in the flats.

Of the 15 customers currently in the flats:

8 have successfully worked with the project and are at the point of move on. As soon as permanent accommodation is found, they will move into it and continue to receive additional Floating Support.

3 customers are working well and are ready to start the move on process.

4 of the customers have only recently been accommodated.

With regard to the previous 23 customers:

6 have been housed into their own accommodation and are successfully maintaining their tenancies. They have not reoffended and remain substance free.

4 went back into prison

4 left of their own accord

9 have been evicted due to constant breach of their licence conditions that include non-engagement with Treatment Services.

*If a customer fails they are not prevented from accessing the accommodation again if they can demonstrate their commitment to engage with services and aspire to work towards independent living.*

## **5. Additional outcomes**

The Housing Options Service has Homelessness Prevention Fund monies – these have been used innovatively to respond to barriers for our customers – including

- Paying of rent in advance to secure tenancies in the privately rented sector
- Paying of rent in advance to enable access to Bridge House
- Providing a bond guarantee scheme
- Paying for a bus fare so customer could return to Sunderland
- Paying for a replacement carpet in a furnished tenancy to enable our customer to have his tenancy renewed

We have been able to secure accommodation in the privately rented sector for our customers by influencing the payment of Housing Benefit direct to the landlord

We have access to Discretionary Housing Benefit to enable housing benefit shortfalls to be bridged temporarily until more affordable housing can be secured.

We have been able to organise Higher Discharge Grants for offenders who we have secured accommodation to avoid being released NFA from prison. This has been used to fund the first 2 weeks rent as no benefits are available to them in this period.

32 customers placed into temporary accommodation who we do not have a responsibility to provide services to and 4 of these are working towards a placement into 155 Norton Road Supported Scheme for rehabilitating substance mis-users

16 offenders leaving prison who were part of the Integrated Offender Management team caseload would have been 'no fixed abode' on their release – all were found accommodation before their release date.

3 customers referred into 155 Norton Road – supported housing scheme

10 customers have been housed via the Choice Based Lettings Scheme and 10 customers are on the Scheme and are actively bidding for property. (Most of these customers would not have been eligible to be part of the Scheme without our involvement to remove barriers such as addressing old debt and advocating on their behalf to housing providers)

7 of the customers we have housed have also received Floating Support in their new homes.

Clearly the new audience we are attracting is the 'hidden homeless' – the people who surf sofas and floors of friends and relatives – the people who we most need to engage with at the earliest opportunity if we are to stop their downwards spiral towards social and financial exclusion.

## **6. Having a Home Project - Specialist Advice Service**

A recent bid to the Northern Rock Foundation has secured 3 years funding for a specialist service that will work exclusively with customers who access the EHO (Alcohol and Substance Misuse).

The bid was made by Stockton District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS) in partnership with the Housing Options Service and following discussions with the Northern Rock Foundation they were keen to see additional commitment from another partner and the DAAT has committed £20,000 funding for the project.

The project outputs and outcomes of the project reflect a strong partnership approach to tackling social and financial exclusion issues for this most disadvantaged and difficult to engage cohort of people. (see appendix 2)

The officer will be based in the Housing Options Service and will work alongside our EHO (Alcohol and Substance Misuse)

## **7. Enhanced Housing Options Officer – Holme House Prison**

DAAT Funding has been secured to deliver this 12 month project.

A senior officer from the Housing Options team will be based in the prison, initially alongside the IOM and CRI teams on the new Drug Recovery Wing.

The aim of the project is to identify and promote pathways and good practice and guidance to housing offenders leaving prison and to up skill agencies and services working within the prison on housing issues and barriers to make them more effective in securing positive housing solutions for their clients.

## **8. Future Pressures**

- Continuation of funding
- Impact of the Welfare Reform – particularly the under 35 ruling for shared accommodation rate
- Lack of single persons accommodation

Caroline Wood  
Housing Options Manager