

Improving Practice in Housing for Drug Users

SECTION 1 Introduction

1.1 Context

'The positive role that housing and services plays in providing drug users with a stable base from which to engage with treatment services and effect change in their lives as well as prevent homelessness is well recognised. Those with accommodation are reported to be nearly twice more likely to have positive outcomes from their treatment than those who have no fixed abode. The provision of accommodation can be particularly important for those who are 'hard to reach'¹ and engaged in harm minimisation services. This will include those that are rough sleeping for some or all of the time.' (Clean Break - Page 19)²

The Home Office Drug Interventions Programme (DIP), Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Ministry of Justice National Offender Management Service (NOMS), the Housing Corporation, the Department of Health's (DH) Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) and the National Treatment Agency (NTA) for Substance Misuse have identified the need to consider the issue of housing and related support services for drug users. They have worked with a national stakeholder group comprising of representatives³ from both housing and drug fields to identify practice and approaches that could inform the development of solutions to tackle some of the complex needs highlighted in the reports Safe as Houses⁴, Clean Break², and Drug Misuse⁵, which may inform the prevention of homelessness amongst drug users.

There is limited research in the UK on the relationships between homelessness, tenancy breakdown and substance misuse. Evidence available suggests that drugs, alcohol, financial problems and offending have an impact on being able to access, secure and sustain housing. The Audit Commission's report⁵ highlighted that *'an overemphasis on treating drug use coupled with a lack of emphasis on providing the support needed to bring order to the often chaotic lives of drug users'* was a factor in housing being an issue. The report concluded that housing, social care and other services must provide drug users with support to help them maintain progress made during treatment and ultimately become employed, housed and more self-sufficient. It also said *'Drug users place a high value on such follow-on help, particularly with housing'*.

This Paper has been written to support the development, planning and delivery of housing and related support services for drug users. It builds on recent practice findings and work undertaken by the Audit Commission (2004⁵/2006⁶), Addaction (2006⁷), Homeless Link (2007²), Shelter (2007⁴), CSIP (2007⁸) and The Respect Standard for Housing Management⁹, and does not seek to duplicate findings and information already shared.

These findings suggest that provision of housing and related support services for drug users can contribute to improving outcomes on cross-cutting areas such as preventing homelessness, increasing engagement and retention in drug treatment, improving health and social well-being, reducing re-offending, acquisitive crime and the causes and effects of anti-social behaviour. Findings highlight the interdependent relationships between these related issues, and

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support the need to embed responses to drug misuse within the cross-cutting 'agendas' of relevant partners.

The new national and local performance frameworks provide opportunities and levers for local strategic partnerships to support development and delivery of integrated support for drug users through a range of indicators. Given the cross-cutting issues raised where local partnerships take measures to improve performance against their selected indicators it is likely that action taken may also deliver improvements in relation to drug misuse and preventing homelessness. (See Section 6 for more details)

Additional reports and evidence¹⁰ support the need for a range of responses and interventions which not only provide support with tackling drugs and alcohol but also start to address areas such as mental health, tenancy management, life skills development, finance and debt management skills, and help with rebuilding relationships with families and friends. These support needs may require interventions by a number of different services with responses which are flexible and which work alongside a range of housing and related support services described in this Paper.

1.2 Purpose

This Paper does not set out to comprehensively describe practice and solutions which meet the full range of support needs that many problem substance misusers may have.

Whilst the focus is on housing for drug users it is important to emphasise that the findings highlighted in this Paper can be applied and adapted to support work with other vulnerable groups including individuals with mental health issues, problem drinkers and offenders. A focus on specific issues relating to alcohol is out of the scope of this Paper, though the role of harmful and hazardous drinking is acknowledged.

Housing has a key role to play in supporting outcomes across a range of areas including tackling worklessness and poverty, and addressing social exclusion. Housing Options Advice¹¹ services, which are enhanced by links to training and employment advice, in-work benefits, financial management and other life skills will play an important role in creating and sustaining housing solutions.

Ensuring access to housing and related support services for drug users at different stages of change and recovery can present a number of challenges¹² for national, regional and local partners. Drug users' problems may be complex and therefore require a wide range of responses and options. These may include better integration between the local commissioning of drug, alcohol, housing and mental health services through to improved joint working between housing and drug services. These issues are particularly important for housing providers (including providers of supported housing) who are already housing drug users and are likely to be facing challenges such as tenancy failures, managing evictions and abandonments, all of which may be drug related.

Identifying and promoting joined up solutions in housing and related support services for drug users is important for local agencies and partnerships that have responsibility for services such as drugs, housing, crime, and community safety or mental health support services. For example, housing services and landlords will have a particular role to play through their proactive approach in tackling anti-

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social behaviour at an early stage - an expectation set out in the Respect Standard for Housing Management⁹ .

Commissioners and all local partners, in particular those from drug services and housing providers, have a key role to play in developing effective and practical solutions for drug users.

The role of housing providers is important in:

- planning for the management of drug issues in their accommodation which will help create a safe environment for all, and will also assist with bringing drug users into treatment thus reducing rates of eviction due to anti-social behaviour and rent arrears
- considering provision of move-on accommodation for those leaving structured drug treatment such as in-patient and/or residential rehabilitation provision
- providing accommodation for drug users not in need of drug treatment

The role of drug services is important in housing by:

- providing support services that can help drug users maintain their housing and minimise harm to others
- helping drug users to address their substance misuse to help them move on from specialist accommodation to other types of housing
- supporting drug users to sustain their housing in order to help them continue to address their substance misuse issues

The role of commissioners is important in :

- improving joint working and partnerships to meet particular performance requirements and/or shared outcomes
- understanding better the housing market and the delivery of support and/or care
- making best use of limited resources and/or links to wider strategic objectives

1.3 Key Aims

The focal point of this Paper is a selection of 13 case studies which offer examples of how housing, drug and mental health services have worked together to find sustainable and successful housing solutions for drug users. Section 3 of the Paper sets out the key findings from the case studies. It describes how existing practice adopted by identified partnerships and projects (in England) could inform and help strategic partnerships, providers and service users to plan, commission and deliver a comprehensive approach to housing and support services for drug users. It also highlights the key principles of successful provision such as effective strategic planning and commissioning, responsive service delivery and service user involvement.

It should be recognised that the selection of case studies was compiled within the available timescales and resources and that there is still scope for further work to address the diverse housing and support needs of drug users as well as for monitoring individual and organisational outcomes. Whilst these issues were evident in some, but not all, of the case studies, and because it was outside the initial scope of this work, these areas have not been explored in the Paper.

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This Paper focuses on identifying and promoting practice in housing for drug users. The key aims are to:

- set out the findings from the case studies 'through a planned approach involving all relevant stakeholders', to provide a way of adding value
- outline a range of case studies that highlight how local partnerships, organisations and service users have planned, delivered and reviewed approaches that can help prevent homelessness, reduce crime and anti-social behaviour alongside helping service users tackle their drug use, improve their health and social wellbeing through accessing housing and related support services including drug services
- highlight findings and solutions from the case studies that could inform practice and planning of a comprehensive approach
- set out the question framework for gathering information from the case study areas as helpful aide/tool
- acknowledge and build on existing guidance and practice

1.4 Who is this Paper for?

This Paper is primarily for anyone involved in commissioning, planning and delivering housing and drug services. It is important to emphasise that this is not just for those working in a specialist environment.

The Paper may also be useful for those working in other sectors such as the criminal justice system, health and social care (hospital as well as community based services) and those working with people who are socially excluded.

1.5 What's in the Paper?

The Paper contains practical information, and findings supported by examples from the case studies. It is recommended that **Section 1 (Introduction)** of this Paper is always read as a minimum. To improve understanding of the context in which the case studies have been delivered, the Paper also gives an overview of supporting information including relevant national strategies, regional and local delivery structures, and information and data sources. The table below sets out the 12 Sections contained within the paper. All sections will be available on the www.drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk website. They can be read and downloaded as separate papers. As additional information becomes available, relevant sections will be reviewed and updated.

Section	Description	Update details
	Living document which will be versioned and updated to keep it relevant and aligned with national strategies and policies	
Executive Summary	Executive Summary – Key messages	Last updated 010808
Section 1	Introduction – Context, Purpose Key Aims and Structure	Last updated 010808
Section 2	Developing Housing and Support for Drug Users – a comprehensive approach	Last updated 010808
Section 3	Summary of Findings from the case studies – draws out themes from the case study and described from perspectives of effective strategic planning and commissioning, responsive service delivery and improved service user involvement supported by examples from the case studies	Last updated 010808
Section 4	The Case Studies – Key part of the practice paper informed by the case study visits and contributions from local stakeholders	Last updated 010808

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Section 5	National Strategies Policies and Related Guidance Including housing, drugs, health & criminal justice	Last updated 010808
Section 6	National Regional and Local Delivery arrangements includes a list of relevant Public Service Agreements and indicators for Housing and Drugs	Last updated 010808
Section 7	Sources of Information and Data and arrangements for information sharing	Last updated 010808
Section 8	Outcomes measures and tools – a brief summary of what is currently being used in drugs and housing	Last updated 010808
Sections 9 a-d	The Housing Drug Advisors Project (HDA) Brief outline of methodology, question framework used and supporting leaflets about the project,	Last updated 010808
Section 10	Key Facts	Last updated 010808
Section 11	Supporting checklist	To be produced following working seminar
Section 12	Terminology and Glossary	Last updated 010808
	Acknowledgements	See attached

It is acknowledged that there is a range of terminology in the field of housing and drugs which in itself can create a number of challenges. This is set out further in Section 12 of this Paper.

In order to ensure consistency, this Paper has adopted the following terms:

- 'service user' is been used to describe drug users as opposed to client or resident.

Housing in this context is taken to include a range of options including social housing, the private rented sector, homeownership including low cost home ownership and supported housing

It is recognised that the term 'support' can cover a wide range of services. In recognition of the complexity of drug users' needs and required responses, the term support has been used in this Paper as follows:

- Housing related support: This term is used to describe the services which help develop and sustain an individual's capacity to live independently in their accommodation. These can include life skills training, tenancy management training, budgeting, managing debt, cooking, getting information, paying bills, etc.
- Housing and support: This term refers to the range of additional support needs including managing drug use, improving physical and mental health, developing life skills, rebuilding relationships with families and friends, working with mentors.

These services can take place in a range of accommodation, including hostels, general needs and other types of tenure, and can include a range of forms of provision, for example, key working, floating support or signposting to other services.

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In the instances where services of both types are being highlighted they are referred to as 'housing and related support'.

Terms outlined in the National Treatment Agency's Models of Care Update 2006 and the recent [Drug Strategy 2008: protecting families and communities](#) have been used to describe drug related provision.

Terms and language used in the case studies have as far as possible been kept as described by the partnership or provider.

¹ The term Hard to reach is quoted here as used by Homeless Link; This Paper recognises those individuals often described as 'hard to reach' may conversely find services hard or difficult to access.

² Homeless Link Clean Break – Development of Integrated housing and care pathways for drug users – Research Report (Homeless Link) 2007

³ See Acknowledgements for working group representatives

⁴ Shelter Safe as Houses: An Inclusive Approach for Housing Drug Users, Steve McKeown (2006), Shelter

⁵ Audit Commission Drug Misuse 2004: Reducing the local impact, Audit Commission (2004)

⁶ Audit Commission: Key Learning on Estate management, Audit Commission (2006)

⁷ Addaction Aftercare Three Years On Mark Stephenson, Addaction (2006)

⁸ Care Services Improvement Partnership What's the Score? Housing Learning and Improvement Network, CSIP (2007)

⁹ Respect Standard for Housing Management, Home Office/Communities and Local Government (2006)

¹⁰ Reducing Re-Offending by ex-offenders Social Exclusion Unit (2002) , Comprehensive Rent Deposit Model Findings (2006) Home Office

¹¹ Housing Options: the Housing Options approach is a method of seeking to prevent homelessness by following a standard approach to all new housing applicants, which reviews their housing circumstances and prospects. *'Housing options advice has a crucial role to play in addressing urgent housing need, but housing options advice should not just be for those in the most acute need. – without positive interventions housing problems may worsen over time so there is a strong argument for offering housing options advice to people before they reach crisis point.'* Further details: Expanding Choice, Addressing Need Addressing Housing Need through the Enhanced Housing Options Approach. CLG 2008 available on line at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/>

¹² Challenges faced are not unique to housing or drugs. They may include problems with previous tenancies, rent arrears, credit rating, and history of anti social behaviour. In collaborative, joint working and understanding of partner agencies not developed or formalised, providers feel unsupported. Eligibility criteria, policies and procedures may be crossed easily which may minimise re-engagement, and exclude those vulnerable groups not yet engaged in treatment or who have relapsed. Lack of housing provision particularly for those with complex needs i.e. mental health limited, reluctance of landlords Partnership and planning structures not well developed. Identifying how partnerships providers and service users can be part of the solution.

The views expressed in this Practice Paper are those of the authors not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect government policy)