

REPORT TO: HOUSING SUPPORT STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

REPORT FROM: DEVON SUPPORTING PEOPLE

DATE: 1<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2009

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## **STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENTS IN THE HOMELESSNESS SECTOR**

### **Objective:**

- To report of the progress of strategic improvements and identify potential further work priorities for the future.

### **1. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT**

- 1.1 In 2008, the partnership commissioned Ian Copeman, of the Housing & Support Partnership, to conduct a strategic review of the Homelessness sector. The review highlighted a number of commissioning options, some of which were turned into 'work packages'. For the full report, please go to:  
<http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/socialcarehealth/sc-partnerships/supportingpeople/servicedevelopment/hsgsteeringgr/homelessness.htm>
- 1.2 An example of a work package which has been successfully completed is the piloting of 'variable volume' contract arrangements through the 'winter pressures' initiative. The design of the new 'performance based' contracts benefited from the learning gathered from the pilot. Arguably, the new contract arrangements are critical in achieving the programme's efficiency savings.
- 1.3 The financial position of the county is now such that there is likely to be a greater need for efficiencies than was previously anticipated. It is therefore fair to assume that this will require further downsizing of homelessness budget

### **2. ACHIEVING EFFECTIVENESS**

- 2.1 In the face of further drives for efficiency, ensuring that strategic work packages come to fruition becomes even more of a priority for commissioners. In June 2009, the JCB approved a number of strategic work packages designed to maximise the effectiveness of current investment in the programme.  
([http://www.devon.gov.uk/hssp\\_124\\_09\\_ap\\_one\\_260509.pdf](http://www.devon.gov.uk/hssp_124_09_ap_one_260509.pdf) )
- 2.2 One of these work packages revolved around the development of a system for ensuring that the partnerships' priority needs are being met by services; this will be achieved through the commissioning of a single gateway and single assessment process.
- 2.3 We have been investigating options for a single gateway in the form of a web based system. There are a number of potential providers including Capita, Abritas and Devon County's in-house, health & social care system, Care First 6.

### **3. SINGLE POINT OF ACCESS**

- 3.1 Benefits of a single gateway and single assessment process include:
- Transparent route into services for service users, carers and referrers
  - Greater choice for service users
  - Efficiency & reduction of bureaucracy as referrals and subsequent assessments only need to be undertaken once
  - Consistent approach to assessment and placement for service users

- County and partnership can monitor overall trends in referrals, waiting lists and unmet needs through management information

3.2 We have been noting the risks identified by partners which include:

- The potential that the systems/ IT solutions available are not suitable for our needs
- Access to the system is not easily achieved for all partners
- Providers feel threatened by the system as it is seen as replacing some of their functions & roles
- Significant investment in new system is wasted as it fails to adequately meet business needs
- Wholesale change to a new system disrupts referrals

3.3 In order to manage the risks identified, the key features of the system would need to include the following:

- Offers a range of different options in terms of functionality; ability to develop bespoke functions e.g. initial assessment /referral form.
- Allows access by multiple agencies e.g. Web-based system.
- Configuration options for 'de-centralised control' as well as 'directly managed'; providers can manage referrals & assessment where appropriate, but in other cases, referrals may need to be directly managed / prioritised by third parties.
- Pilot period for the system with a sub-group of the programme e.g. one district, one care group only.

3.4 The software packages being considered have a wide range of different functions for housing support programmes. However, it is likely that, in order to assess a new web-based systems' suitability, Devon will commission a pilot, against a set of minimum requirements, for a fixed period. These requirements are likely to be:

- The system will function as a 'support register' or database for referrals
- The system will include a simple referral form which suggests an indicative level of need to providers
- The system will allow providers to draw down potentially suitable referrals and undertake further assessment (using the agreed single assessment form)
- The system will allow providers to upload any assessments completed

3.5 Value for money will also be a key consideration and therefore cost effectiveness will be one of the key criteria for evaluation of the options.

3.6 Appendix One outlines process maps which support the business case for a single gateway into services. More detailed process maps have been outlined for pathways into Older persons' services and similar process maps will need to be developed for Homelessness.

3.7 A single point of access is a key feature of all commissioning strategies under the programme. In preparation for this change, Older persons' providers have already agreed and are using a single assessment form. In the City of Exeter group, older person's providers are ready to move to floating support early next year and would be an ideal pilot for the new system.

#### **4. FURTHER OPTIONS FOR STRATEGIC IMPROVEMENTS**

4.1 There are further opportunities for maximising the effectiveness of the Homelessness investment. Currently, the newly formed Homelessness steering group, now the 'The Devon Homelessness & Social Inclusion Reference Group',

is working with Shaun Bennett (CIVIS) to complete a refresh of the JSNA for Homelessness. This will look at current & projected needs in the context of enhanced efficiency and effectiveness, which is likely to result in a number of potential options for re-design.

4.2 The options for re-design will fall into two main areas: contracting & procurement, re-design options for services. In particular, a 'framework agreement' is being considered as a form of procurement to shape the future market and deliver further efficiencies.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

5.1 Devon County Council intends to develop and propose options for improving pathways into homelessness sector services, as part of a wider initiative to evidence improved alignment of resources against service user need.