

## **ANNEXE EIGHT**

# **VULNERABLE YOUNG ADULTS AND FAMILIES STRATEGY**

**Devon Children's Trust**  
**Housing Strategy for Vulnerable Children, Young People**  
**and Families"**

**1. Context**

- 1.1 National and local research has established the link between housing poverty and poor outcomes for vulnerable families and young people. For this reason the Children's Trust Vulnerable Adolescents Group identified housing services and support as a key priority and used Children's Trust grant to commission an independent consultant (Nicholas Day & Associates) to produce an integrated housing and children's services strategy.
- 1.2 The process used to do this was as follows:
- Initial data and information gathering used national and local research and the outcomes of the district council Homelessness Reviews and Strategies.
  - Questionnaires were distributed to district councils, housing providers, children and young people services, Link2Gether Young People's Forum and Supporting People. In all 21 agencies returned questionnaires.
  - A county stakeholder event facilitated by Dr Mark Redmond from Bournemouth University, Community Studies Dept. involved 45 representatives from 29 agencies. The day was used to validate data and perspectives gained through the information gathering and questionnaire phases. A total of 14 young people were consulted individually but chose not to participate in the day.
  - Development of a draft strategy for consultation with: Devon Supporting People, Devon Strategic Housing Group, housing associations, young people, YOT, DAT, Connexions, youth services, social services, CAMHS, police, domestic violence and teenage pregnancy services. The final Strategy will be submitted to the Children's Trust Board for approval with a view to implementation from April 2005.
- 1.3 This work suggested that the system is not working effectively for many vulnerable families and young people. This is not to say there is no goodwill; only that historic practices and service configurations do not always favour effective working between housing providers and children's services or with young people and their families, nor do they encourage good transitions into sustainable and independent living. This strategy attempts to promote a common approach that tackles some of the skill, resource and support deficits behind the most disheartening problems, such as repeat homelessness while working to avoid housing failure in the first place.

**2. Summary of Current Needs**

- 2.1 There is a need for substantially more independent and semi-independent housing to provide move-on from higher support provision. The need is for affordable housing through a mixed economy of public and private sector tenancies. It is anticipated that the supply of private sector housing might increase if floating support is available and bureaucratic and financial blocks are minimised.

- 2.2 This absence of move-on causes 'silting-up' in supported accommodation (hostels or shared housing) which reduces overall system capacity and leads to calls to expand such accommodation despite the known cost, dependency and welfare drawbacks. There is consensus that hostels and shared housing, while useful in some circumstances, should not form the backbone of our strategy. There is a need to rethink how more effective and efficient supported housing can be provided, for example, through expansion of rural rent-a-room and supported lodgings type schemes linked to personal transport solutions, such as 'wheels to work'.
- 2.3 There is a need for more floating support to:
- Prevent homelessness in the first place
  - Assist with transitions along the housing 'pathway' and into independent housing
  - Continue to support people who may need it, because of their young age, disability or emotional fragility, to maintain themselves in the longer term
  - Help with practical needs, such as painting, decorating or minor repairs
- 2.4 Aspects of the current homeless application and decision making processes appeared problematic for some client groups. Young people in particular described being left to fill out forms they did not understand; while if they left their B&B because they felt unsafe, ran the risk of being deemed 'intentionally homeless'. This reflected a wider need for more support to be offered to young people and vulnerable families in temporary housing, particularly at key transitions.
- 2.5 The operational partnership between agencies needs to be more effective and 'joined up'. Inefficiencies are created by the current focus on pinning responsibility for accommodating people with complex needs onto single agencies. For example, current practice, in several districts, around 'intentionally homeless' families has led to very expensive arrangements but very poor outcomes for the children concerned.
- 2.6 The housing 'pathway' needs to work more effectively to enable people to move on more speedily from temporary, often high cost, accommodation. This requires better information flows between agencies, as well as floating support staff providing the key worker where there was no social worker or other statutory agent.
- 2.7 The absence of emergency support and accommodation, is a specific gap in provision for young people. Often this meant non-housing staff offering housing advice which is of variable quality. It was also noted that some housing staff did not have the skills or aptitude to engage with young people, in effect rendering the housing project ineffective in its mission, or the statutory agency ineffective in the advice it offered. This absence of competence and/or lack of commitment were seen as a very specific barrier to involving service users in generating their own solutions.
- 2.8 A lack of skills and confidence among housing advice and hostel staff, combined with organisational focus on reducing risks and linking funding to occupancy rates, has encouraged agencies to "cherry pick" the more manageable referrals.
- 2.9 One way of promoting partnership at the same time as developing the quality agenda is for non-housing agencies and their staff to be given housing performance indicators, and housing agencies and staff to be given

performance indicators related to *Every Child Matters* outcomes. This would promote understanding of other agency's work and priorities while placing service users at the centre of joint effort.

- 2.10 While the development of outcome-based joint commissioning and joined-up operational partnerships will foster a more child-centred approach, more should and could be done to further service user involvement in every aspect of service design and delivery. Resources, support and advice will be required to develop this further.
- 2.11 More should be done to further the preventative agenda by switching resources away from the current crisis and hostel based focus. This includes developing more local and young-person-friendly housing advice and information and strengthening mediation using family group conferencing / restorative type approaches.
- 2.12 Preventative advice about pitfalls and costs of independent living as well as key housing skills should begin in the secondary school / Connexions system.
- 2.13 There was a call by providers to recognize the true costs of starting up and running services. Costs might be reduced if there was more stability and simplicity in the contracting process. This would be helped by fewer year-on-year contracts and grants and combining the various income streams into single contracts.
- 2.14 There is an almost total absence of inter-agency training and little understanding between housing and children's services. Training should include, understanding the aims and constraints of partner agencies, evidence of what helps achieve improved outcomes and the opportunity to shadow colleagues in other agencies.

2.15

### **3 Strategic Expectations**

- 3.1 Investment should be consistent with the principles of Every Child Matters.

Participation of service users and providers needs to be at the heart of the process. The partnership between housing and children's services should focus on improved outcomes for children and young people not sectoral perspectives. This will be supported by adopting a joint commissioning approach that encourages:

- Clarity about priorities and objectives for services using joint performance indicators linked to aligned funding streams and integrated market building.
- Broad consistency (not uniformity) in the quality and availability of services across the local authority districts in Devon

- 3.2 A planned shift from dealing with crisis and short term needs towards early intervention and preventative work. More 'preventative floating support' to help vulnerable families and teenagers find their own solutions and reduce homelessness and repeat homelessness by tackling the early warning signs of breakdown.

- 3.3 A review of the *Supporting People* input to redirect resources from accommodation focussed into floating support and within accommodation based resources from (a) generic into specialist, and (b) 'low/medium' into 'complex' client groups
- 3.4 A shift towards projects that encourage independence and holistic outcomes for the families, children or young people involved, and away from expenditure designed to respond purely to homelessness.
- 3.5 If eviction does occur, to prioritise joined up solutions that allow homeless families with vulnerable children – including intentionally homeless families – to re-establish themselves into productive life and learning as quickly as possible.
- 3.6 Strengthening joint work between housing agencies and schools, colleges and Connexions to improve young people's access to practical advice and skills and help inform decisions about future housing options.
- 3.7 Development of floating support services that:
- Provide the lead worker / named worker if necessary
  - Focus on prevention and improving life chances rather than tenure
  - Integrate the contribution from all relevant agencies
  - Support settling into accommodation and making it a home
  - Maximise practical living skills, benefit take-up and budget management.
- 3.8 Support for initiatives to increase availability of independent move-on housing for vulnerable families and young people, particularly which build a mixed economy of types of tenure and provision across urban and rural localities.
- 3.9 Encouragement of pilot/innovation projects that:
- Link housing to local authority economic and social inclusion strategies in the areas from which young people often migrate because of the lack of affordable rented housing and perceived economic opportunity
  - Help to build market capacity through encouraging existing or new private landlords to take vulnerable families and young people;
  - Promote service user involvement in planning, co-ordination and feedback
  - That focuses on improving transition and move-on into maximum independence.

#### **4. Commissioning Priorities for 2005 - 2007**

- 4.1 That Supporting People, district housing authorities and children's services should use the current Supporting People reviews to begin to align their planning and commissioning priorities:
- To redirect current individual agency spending towards integrated responses, including: expansion of mediation and tenancy retention; short stay respite /Night Stop type arrangements; provision of limited and dispersed crisis / stabilisation accommodation; development of benefits, debt and behaviour management strategies available to housing providers and courts as alternative to eviction.
  - To encourage a shift within existing shared accommodation based projects away from low/medium towards specialist provision for young people or families with high needs and/or to support employment, education and

training opportunities for teenage parents, care leavers, ex-offenders and young people with disabilities.

- To enable reinvestment from shared accommodation based services into floating support and individually tailored – independent or semi-independent solutions, including expansion of Supported Lodgings and similar rent-a-room schemes.

4.2 That district housing authorities and relevant children's services should explore opportunities including the second round Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA2) and Local Area Agreements to work together to encourage:

- Better alignment of current spending to strengthen and improve the availability and quality of information and advice available to young people aged 14 – 19 and parents/carers of teenagers.
- Encourage improved inter-agency training and information exchange between housing and children's services
- Development of a Foyer strategy for Devon which strengthens understanding and impact of the relationship between housing and employment opportunities
- Review of current practices and protocols to develop a more integrated, cost effective and sustainable approach to responding to vulnerable families, children and young people who are homeless.

**07/12/04**