

# **ENHANCED HOUSING OPTIONS (EHO) IN WEST DORSET**

## **OVERVIEW AND ACTION PLAN**

### **1) National Context – Challenges to Local Authority Housing Advice Services**

The United Kingdom economy is in recession. While banks are competing for savings, customers' disposable income is under such pressures that there is unlikely to be a "surge" of savings into banks to support more mortgage lending. As a result the housing market has become less fluid. House prices and home loan approvals continue to fall from 2007 levels. Some homeowners are having difficulties repaying their mortgages due to unemployment and decreasing incomes. The Government has acknowledged this by the creation of the mortgage rescue scheme.

Benefit takeup levels are increasing. The challenges of increasing homelessness prevention and reducing the use of temporary accommodation are rising in this economic climate. National targets, such as the elimination of bed and breakfast accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds by 2010 and the publication of the rough sleeper strategy with the requirement to eradicate rough sleeping by 2012 are testing.

There have been two recent challenges to the ongoing use of private sector housing. The first is the knock-on effect of the recession and the concern that buy-to-let landlords may decrease and the second is the advent of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and the fears this can engender in private landlords.

### **2) West Dorset in Context**

West Dorset covers some 471 square miles to the extreme west and north west of the county. 74% of the area is classed as an area of outstanding natural beauty. Housing in West Dorset is expensive. The latest Land Registry data suggests that the average property price in West Dorset is around 25% higher than the average for England and Wales and slightly above the average for the whole of Dorset. The rate of increase in property prices in the District over the past few years has been significant. Between the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2001 and the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2006 average property prices in West Dorset rose by 75.6%. In the private rented sector, minimum rents for 1-bedroom accommodation start at around £400 pcm, 2-bedroom properties start at around £525 pcm and 3-bedroom accommodation is not available at less than £560 pcm.

### **3) Housing Options, Homelessness Prevention and Homelessness Services**

West Dorset's homelessness service returned in-house November 2006 and was remodelled to provide comprehensive housing options.

Improvements made to the service since November 2006, many of which are mentioned in the CLG Menu of Options and Action Planning toolkit, include:

- 3 frontline homelessness prevention Housing Advice Officer (HAO) posts created
- A tenancy liaison officer post working with landlords and tenants finding households in need private sector tenancies
- Appointment of a money adviser working with clients in receipt of LHA to help them with basic budgeting, setting up bank accounts etc.
- The introduction of an older persons housing options service as a 2-year pilot
- The introduction of a standard housing options interview and form, followed up by a letter giving action points for both the client and the officer
- Carrying out home visits when appropriate
- More intensive use of the council's rent in advance/rent bond scheme (97 cases in 2007/08, 116 in the year to the end of February 2009)
- The creation of a homelessness prevention fund
- Producing a homelessness services directory and a comprehensive suite of advice booklets
- A translation service and large print documents are available
- Creative solutions to common practical barriers e.g. a pet bond offering a deep clean on tenancy termination to landlords who accept our clients with pets
- Use of a 2-way referral form with the local CABx
- Offering Housing Advice Centre facilities to other agencies, for example, Dorset Women's Outreach Project (DWOP) surgeries

West Dorset's will implement choice based letting as a partner in the HomeChoice sub-regional scheme on 25 March 2009.

Quarterly meetings of the West Dorset Homelessness Prevention forum are held with our partner agencies, such as the DWOP, Magna Housing Association (MHA) and local youth and rough sleeper agencies. The 5 non-unitary Dorset authorities published a joint homelessness strategy in 2008 which is subject to quarterly review meetings.

In West Dorset in the 2007/08 financial year 680 housing options interviews took place in 2007/08, homelessness decisions reduced to 123 and we accepted duty to only 56 households. Homelessness was prevented in 437 cases.

In the year to the end of February 2009, 564 housing options interviews took place, the number of homelessness decisions fell even further to 71 and duty was accepted to 33 households. Homelessness was prevented in 530 cases.

The District has a successful landlord accreditation scheme with over 100 members and regular Landlords' Forum meetings.

#### **4) Enhanced Housing Options**

Average income in West Dorset is below the national average. Many residents work in lower paid jobs in service industries, agriculture and tourism. House prices are 25% above the national average. The District is sparsely populated with no tertiary education. 37% of the population are pensioners. Whilst delivery of affordable housing is the council's top corporate priority, best use of existing stock is vital. The council is keen to demonstrate how enhanced housing options services can be successfully and effectively delivered in a rural area with a small private rented sector and is concentrating its efforts on helping residents, especially young people, to obtain access to jobs and training, as well as giving practical help to the elderly to find the best housing solutions to fit their needs.

In West Dorset EHO funding will be used specifically for the following four projects:

- a) Provision of a Young Person's Housing Advisor by Connexions. The postholder will sit in the Social Services Locality Team and part of their remit will be to forge links between housing and social services.
- b) Remodelling of the outdated IT suite at West Rivers House (WRH) and a re-launch of the facility as a training space for partner agencies to use for access to employment and training and personal development courses
- c) Provision of a rural outreach service, following on from the recommendations of a research project and with the possible development of a common multi-agency assessment and referral framework
- d) Extension of the existing Older Persons Housing Options Officer (HOO) role to providing intensive support for older people wishing to move, and with the wider aims of promoting independence, improving health and reducing social isolation

In addition the CLG Menu of Options and Action Planning toolkit for delivering EHO offers suggestions for other initiatives that can be implemented at minimal cost and which fit in well with the existing service, such as:

- Focussing on the customer: introducing a “systems thinking” approach, mapping advice services through rural outreach, reconsidering service hours and improving the existing website; hosting a CAB information kiosk.
- Making the core options toolkit work harder: introduction a tenant accreditation scheme; re-appraising rent deposit in the light of the introduction of LHA to make it more attractive to landlords; taking forward the work done in the pilot rough sleeper assertive outreach project, establishing closer links with the First Dorset Credit Union; setting up a more intensive tenancy support package in partnership with Supporting People to maintain tenancies gained by ex-rough sleepers.
- The housing options “Plus” service: working towards giving CABx a pot of homelessness prevention funding, extending CBL to the private rented sector; working with MHA on a package to tackle underoccupation, developing a countywide move on strategy, recording employment status and signposting as part of housing options interviews.

The Menu of Options will be fully assessed throughout the life of the project to assess additional enhancements.

## **5) Developing Strong Working Relationships With Partners**

West Dorset’s EHO Programme relies strongly on its external partners. The main partners are:

- Ansbury, which delivers Connexions services across Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole, and was formed in 1995 from Dorset Careers.
- The YOU Trust (formerly Southern Focus Trust) is the provider of floating support services across Dorset, and also manages young person’s supported accommodation West Dorset, Wollaston Road in Dorchester, Osborne Road in Sherborne and WRH (formerly Bridport Foyer) in Bridport. WRH provides 17 bed spaces for otherwise homeless young people. As well as the training room, it incorporates a work-training centre for vulnerable adults, the “Oh Crumbs” café.
- Maximus Employment and Training (UK) will be delivering skills, personal development and employment-related training at WRH for residents and external clients. They currently run 7 Government-funded access to work schemes, including Fit for Work and Work Preparation and run a small job club in Bridport which will be relocated to WRH.

- Anchor Staying Put is a Home Improvement Agency and has been working in West Dorset for 2 years on a pilot of older persons housing options services
- West Dorset Care and Repair is an in-house agency that helps older and disabled people in West Dorset lead independent lives.
- Dorset County Council Supporting People Team
- Magna Housing Association – MHA are the largest RSL in West Dorset and hold 80% of housing association stock in the District. They also own WRH.

Along with the 3 CABx in West Dorset (Dorchester, Bridport and Sherborne) these partners, along with the Council, form the EHO Project Board. Terms of reference of the Board are attached at Appendix 1.

## **6) Exit Strategy**

Throughout the life of the project we will be mindful of the need to take successful initiatives into the council's mainstream options and prevention service. Regarding the four specific projects we have devised the following exit strategies:

- a) Older persons HOO – The Supporting People Team have expressed as strong interest in monitoring the outcomes of this initiative and supporting its continuation, if successful, beyond 2011.
- b) The majority of the WRH project is capital improvement. There will be a cost to agencies renting the facility. YOU have costed that if the IT suite is used by external agencies for a minimum of 6 hours per week this will cover the maintenance costs in future. One of the actions in the project plan aims to maximise the use of the room through other organisations, such as Weymouth College.
- c) We would like to integrate the work of the Young Person's Housing Adviser into the West Dorset Locality Team. Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services will be commissioned by Dorset County Council in 2011 and our aim is to demonstrate that this is a valuable, cost effective service with measurable outcomes that should be perpetuated.
- d) Part of the workplan for the rural outreach project is to commission and carry out a point of access project and as the shape of the service will be determined by the research and the recommendations of this report, the brief will include drawing up an exit strategy.

## 7) Action Plan

Preparation and Management of EHO Services							
What We will do?	When will we do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target/ Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
Carry out impact assessment and risk assessment of EHO project	01/04/09	HoH	Staff time	-		Completed assessment	
Create stakeholder implementation group	01/02/09	LOHN	Staff time	Decide membership Form Group Meetings Diarized and effective	Multi-agency strategic and operational approach	Better understanding, referral mechanisms	Complete. TOR drawn up, quarterly meeting schedule agreed
Develop a framework for consulting customers on the impact of improvements	01/01/10	LOHN	Staff time	Draw up questionnaire Set up focus group Test Amend	Assess impact of improvements	Customer questionnaire	
Ensure existing options structure FFP	01/04/09	HoH/LOHN/ HAC Manager	Staff time	Assess service Plan improvements Implement	Efficient service	Triage system More cases being dealt with at Front desk Only one officer making s.184 decisions	
Healthcheck core service against CLG/Audit Commission Systems Diagnostic	01/04/09	LOHN	Staff time	Carry out assessment Identify shortcomings Make improvements	Efficient service	Modern and comprehensive service	
Ensure complete suite of essential letters and forms in place	01/04/09	HAC Manager	Staff time	Review paperwork Assess gaps Add/amend items as necessary	Efficient service	Faster processing of paperwork	
Liaise with CAB to provide information kiosk	01/03/09	LOHN	Staff time, CAB funding	Agree in principle Install	Additional public information	Increased CAB referrals, high use of equipment	
Improve CAB SLAs	01/04/09	Community Support Team Leader	Staff time	Internal meetings CAB scoping meetings Agreement	Debt counselling	Better awareness levels, personal service to meet needs	

Young Person's Housing Adviser							
What We will do?	When will we do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target/ Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
Recruit Young Person's housing adviser (YPHA)		Connexions	EHO funding Cost over life of project: £84,240	Production of Job Description and Person Specification		YPHA in post and liaison with stakeholders commenced	
Prepare Job Description and Person Specification	15/01/09				Materials for Advertisement	Realistic applications	
Internal Connexions advertisement	15/01/09-29/01/09				Advertisement on intranet	A strong field of applicants	
Short listing of candidates (external advertisement if necessary)	15/02/09				Shortlist produced	4-6 qualified and experienced candidates	
Interview	01/03/09				Best candidate selected	Applicant accepts post	
Induction to Connexions	01/04/09-15/04/09	Connexions	Team manager		Completion of induction workbook	YPHA familiar with Connexions aims values and processes	
Induction to West Dorset Housing	01/05/09	WDDC	Staff time		"	YPHA familiar with WDDC aims values and processes	
Train YPHA (if necessary)	31/03/10	Connexions	EHO funding	Registration Formal qualification	NVQ4 in information Advice and Guidance	Achievement of qualification; passing probationary period	
Common Assessment Framework and Child protection training (if necessary)		Connexions/D CC					
Introduction to the West Dorset Children's services multi-agency team	01/5/09	Connexions	Team Manager		Completion of partnership agreement with Locality Manager	YPHA integrated into Locality team	
Training in West Dorset Housing policies and procedures	01/05/09	WDDC	Staff time		YPHA competent in use of WDDC policies and procedures	YPHA applying procedures in all cases	
Benefits Training	01/05/09	Connexions Training Team			Complete training	Able to advise on full range of benefits	
Information leaflet	01/06/09	Connexions information	£500		Completed leaflet	Stakeholders aware of YPHA role	

		Adviser and YPHA					
Presentations to local stake holders;  Youth Offending Team Rendezvous drop-in centre – Sherborne Inspirations Young persons Café – Lyme Regis Leaving Care team	01/06/09	YPHA	Information leaflet		One visit to each organisation	Referral mechanisms in place and operating successfully	
Receive young person referrals from local stakeholders and from Housing Department. Where necessary completing the Common Assessment form and making referrals as appropriate	From 01/05/09 Then Ongoing	YPHA		Will need to set quarterly output figures	Production of written outcomes and CAFs	YP have a realistic plan of action	
Meet with PSHE co-ordinators in the 5 Secondary Schools	31/7/09	YPHA/ School Personal Adviser			Agreement from school to work together to improve curriculum	Motivated PSHE co-ordinator	
Assess current housing input into the 14-19 Curriculum	31/7/09	YPHA			Agree action plan for curriculum improvement	Commitment from School	
Provide curriculum materials to improve and complement current curriculum provision with emphasis on the local situation	01/01/10	YPHA			Production of materials	Young people having realistic view of local and national housing provision	
Receive Young Person referrals from schools. Where necessary completing the Common Assessment form and making referrals as appropriate	From 01/05/09 Then Ongoing	YPHA		Will need to set quarterly output figures	Production of written outcomes and CAFs	YP have a realistic plan of action	
Plan exit strategy	31/12/10	Connexions/ LOHN	Staff time	Assess impact of post. Complete report for Children's Services commissioning board Ascertain other future funding Draw up plan	Continuation of post if a proven success	Permanent post or justification why not	



Provision of Training Suite at West Rivers House (WRH)							
What We will do?	When will we do it by?	Who will deliver this?	Resources Needed	Milestones	Target/ Outcome	What would success look like?	Comments
Procure / update equipment at West Rivers House.	01/06/09	YOU WDDC IT Magna HA	Homelessn ess Prevention funding Capital cost £7,700	IT specification Procurement process	Modern IT suite	Resident involvement in planning stage High level of use of equipment and space	
Ensure appropriate use of the facility	01/01/10	YOU	Staff time	Code of conduct Monitoring in place	Appropriate use	Use by outside agencies, WRH internal groups and individuals	
Develop links with other agencies e.g. Weymouth college	01/09/09	YOU Maximus Employment & Training	Staff time	Comms/ Marketing Plan	Use of facilities for skills and IT training	6 sessions per week booked by outside agencies	
Provide courses in life skills and employment opportunities.	01/09/10	YOU Maximus Employment and Training	Staff time Student funding	Preliminary scoping meeting Draw up curriculum Advertise	Better training opportunities Less NEETs	Students obtaining jobs	
Relocate Bridport Job Club	01/09/10	YOU Maximus Employment and Training	Staff time	Agree timing of sessions, Fee for room	Better jobseeking resources for Bridport	Applicants applying for jobs online, Increased numbers finding work	

<b>Rural Outreach Service</b>							
<b>What We will do?</b>	<b>When will we do it by?</b>	<b>Who will deliver this?</b>	<b>Resources Needed</b>	<b>Milestones</b>	<b>Target/ Outcome</b>	<b>What would success look like?</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Commission and carry out point of access project	01/07/09	HoH LOHN Consultancy	Bid funding Staff time	Market Testing Appoint consultant Agree report	Knowledge to target future funding and staff resources	Completed report with action plan	
Recruit Housing Advice Officer (18 month contract)	01/09/09	LOHN HAC manager	Staff time EHO funding Employment costs £49,204 over 18 months	Advert Interviews Selection Appointment	HAO in post by 01/04/09	HAO working effectively within 3 months	
Develop outreach surgeries	01/09/09	HAO	Staff time	Research customer origin Assess mobility difficulties Find locations Advertise	Regular surgeries in towns/major villages High percentage of kept appointments	Measurable increase in homelessness prevention	
Establish links with other organizations	31/12/09	HAO	Staff time	Scope what other organizations are doing Agree how we can add value without duplication Introduce multi-agency referral framework	Multi-agency surgeries	Well-used surgeries where customers attend for a variety of advice Clients referred from first point of contact Reduction in homelessness approaches from rural areas	
Consult customers and other stakeholders	31/03/10	HAO	Staff time	Compile questionnaire Set up focus groups Assess results Repeat	Personal service to meet needs	Proof that surgeries and personal referrals deliver customers needs	

<b>Older Persons Housing Options – provided by Anchor Staying Put</b>							
<b>What We will do?</b>	<b>When will we do it by?</b>	<b>Who will deliver this?</b>	<b>Resources Needed</b>	<b>Milestones</b>	<b>Target/ Outcome</b>	<b>What would success look like?</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Secure funding for existing countywide service	01/03/09	Dorset SP Partnership	£56K for period to July 2010	Funding committed by partners	Existing service funded until July 2010	As existing	Costs for additional 2 days per week over life of project: £22,000
Develop links to Health Authority	01/04/09	LOHN Dorset Health Authority	Staff time	Liaison arrangements set up	HOOPs service linked to Health Visitor service	Referrals between agencies effectively addressing housing/health issues	
Extend existing service	01/04/09	ASP LOC&R Help the Aged	EHO funding Handyperson scheme Health Authority staff time	Post increased to full time	Offer ongoing support for 6 months Enable increasing numbers of older people to live independently Make best use of accommodation available Make best use of money for adaptations Target under occupation	Prevention of: Debt Benefit problems Social isolation/depression Less under occupation	
Develop referral systems with Health Workers/O.Ts	01/09/09	LOHN LOC&R Dorset HA	Staff time	Working party established Referral procedures and arrangements in place	Housing issues and health issues addressed by joint working party	Prevention of: Debt Benefit problems Social isolation/depression Less under occupation	
Fully integrate work of HOOP service with other EHO services	01/04/10	LOHN	Staff time	Individual services established. Monitoring of services by steering group. Commonalities in services identified. Frontline staff trained to recognize need for other services. Referral arrangements in place.	Fully integrated EHO service	Prevention of: Debt Benefit problems Social isolation/depression Less under occupation	

Monitoring Framework										
PI	Quarterly Data									
	Target	Baseline	Q1 09/10 (Baseline)	Q2 09/10	Q3 09/10	Q4 09/10	Q1 10/11	Q2 10/11	Q3 10/11	Q4 10/11
<b>Young person's services</b>										
Number of 16/17 year olds accessing B&B	>4 per year	2								
Number of clients engaged	200 (total)	0								
Numbers completing a written outcome/action plan	250 (total)	0								
Numbers referred to education or training	150 (total)	0								
Number of clients moving into employment	75 (total)	0								
Number of clients moving into training	75 (total)	0								
Percentage of NEETs	3.5%	4.3%								
<b>Housing Outreach</b>										
Deliver basic housing options awareness and homelessness prevention training to all DCC front line services	4 per year	0								
Deliver basic housing options awareness and homelessness prevention training to partner agencies	4 per year	0								
Deliver basic housing options awareness and homelessness prevention training to community organizations	4 per year	0								
Contribute to the P1E target in respect of the prevention of homelessness and repeat homelessness by raising awareness of people's options	Homelessness acceptances below 25 per year	35								
<b>Older Persons Housing Options</b>										
Numbers of clients reducing fuel poverty in their home	20	0								
Numbers of clients minimizing their household expenditure	20	0								
Numbers of clients increasing their financial security	20	0								
Numbers of clients seeing friends and relatives regularly	10	0								
Numbers of clients involved in community based activities	10	0								

Numbers of clients managing their physical and/or mental health better	15	0								
Numbers of clients prevented from hospital, care or nursing home admission	25	0								
Rural Outreach										
There are no indicators set for this part of the project yet. They will be established as part of the initial research project phase.										

**ENHANCED HOUSING OPTIONS PROJECT BOARD  
TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**Membership**

Representatives from:

- Housing Section, West Dorset District Council
- Connexions
- Anchor Staying Put
- YOU
- Maximus Employment and Training
- Supporting People
- Magna Housing Association
- CABx

The Chairman to be WDDC Head of Housing

**Purpose of the Group**

- To deliver the West Dorset Enhanced Housing Options Trailblazer Programme
- To progress the action plan
- To set up and review a monitoring framework
- To monitor spend of the funding
- To report to CLG
- To share best practice with other authorities
- To assimilate proven enhancements into the regular workplan

**Frequency of Meetings**

The Group will meet 4 times per year