

Evaluation of Enhanced Housing Options Programme

Evaluation Framework and Methodology for the EHO Trailblazer Initiative

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This report has been written as part of the evaluation of the Enhanced Housing Options Trailblazers Programme, which is being undertaken for the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) by a team from the Universities of Cambridge and Birmingham, and Shared Intelligence. The views and proposals presented in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of CLG.

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Introduction

1. The Enhanced Housing Options Trailblazers (EHO) programmes (run by CLG with support from DWP) aim to develop innovative approaches to delivering housing options/advice services. They offer housing advice to people with low and medium housing need as well as those with acute need, and link housing and wider advice about a range of issues such as training and employment, financial management, and access to benefits.
2. The four key objectives for enhanced housing options services are:
 - Meeting housing need with a wider range of solutions;
 - Using stock more effectively;
 - Tackling worklessness;
 - Improving customer service.
3. There are three programmes (First Phase/Extra, Second Phase/Standard and the most recent, Kickstart – see *Evaluation of Enhanced Housing Options Programme: Scoping Report 2009* paras 1.5-1.11), funded for approximately two years. During this period the implementation, operation and development of the proposed service enhancements are to be evaluated.
4. Specifically, the objectives that have been set for the evaluation are:
 - To assemble robust evidence on the process issues associated with setting up enhancements to existing services, as proposed by the Trailblazers;
 - To measure the success of the programmes in achieving core objectives (meeting housing need with a wider range of solutions; using stock more effectively; tackling worklessness; and improving customer service);
 - To track the immediate and longer term outcomes for the different client groups who approach the service;
 - To explore the costs of running the service and the additional net cost savings and other benefits that the service can generate;
 - To identify lessons learnt, leading to the development of a good practice toolkit as part of a series of measures to enable the Housing Options approach and to encourage the development of enhanced Housing Options services by other local authorities.
5. Further information on the EHO evaluation programme and the first phase of the work that has been undertaken as part of the evaluation can found in *Evaluation of Enhanced Housing Options Programme: Scoping Report 2009*.
6. The purpose of this report is to present some ideas and to identify proposals concerning the framework that is to be employed in the evaluation of the EHO initiative. It also summarises the methods that will be used in applying that framework. The report proceeds by, first, attempting an overview of possible approaches to evaluation before discussing issues of measurement and the question of how identified changes might be linked, for evaluation purposes, to the impact of policy. Central to this question is the general issue

7. Having presented ideas on the above, the report then presents an overview of how the evaluation framework is to be operationalised, followed by a more detailed view of the methods by which this will be achieved, outlining the six phases of the research and feedback arrangements that the Evaluation Team are proposing.

Approaches to Evaluation – An Overview

8. In considering the evaluation approach, it is necessary first to distinguish between a *summative* evaluation, also known as an outcome or impact evaluation, and a *formative* evaluation, also known as process evaluation. A summative evaluation of the Enhanced Housing Options (EHO) initiative would seek to assess the value or worth of EHO outcomes, usually at the end of the initiative or at some identified point during its currency when outcomes can be expected to be identified. A formative evaluation would aim to identify and describe the process by which the EHO is implemented and delivered, during the period that it is being implemented and delivered. It would also differentiate between conditions under which the initiative is more likely to work, thus enabling the processes of implementation and delivery to be modified and amended, or perhaps abandoned.
9. One of the objectives of the EHO evaluation noted above (see also *Evaluation of Enhanced Housing Options Programme: Scoping Report* 2009 para 1.30) requires the Team to feed back the lessons that have emerged to other local authorities in the form of a good practice toolkit. Importantly, it is also proposed that prior to the production of this toolkit, the Team provide feedback to the Trailblazers through a series of workshops intended to ensure that lessons are being learned as the evaluation (and the EHO initiative itself) proceeds, allowing participants to share best practice and develop further than they otherwise might during the two years of the evaluation. This suggests that there is a strong 'formative' element to the evaluation. Further, while other objectives of the evaluation require the measurement of the programme's success and the identification and tracking of outcomes for service users, these activities will be undertaken while the EHO initiative is still on-going, not *ex post*. Consequently, the work of the Team can be conceived of as being in the nature of a formative evaluation that may be used to inform and refine EHO service delivery after the completion of the evaluation itself.
10. Having recognised this, the process is one of *evaluation* not simply one of simply *describing* the activities, inputs and outcomes of the EHO programme. Hence, it is necessary to identify any changes that are ascribable to policy and to the activities of the Trailblazers, and the activities and their associated outcomes that can be termed more and less successful. This requires consideration of four issues:
 - the identification of changes
 - ascribing those changes to policy

- assessing the degree of success
- determining what is to be evaluated

Identifying Change – The Issue of Measurement

11. The government's preferred approach to evaluation is set out in The Green Book, Appraisal and Evaluation in Central Government (HM Treasury, 2003). This states that 'objectives, outcomes and outputs should be defined and quantified as precisely as possible' (para 7.7) and that evaluations should provide '[an] assessment, quantified where possible, of what happened' (para 7.11).
12. Targets as such for the EHO have not been set by CLG. However, expectations regarding the desired outcomes in the form of four key or 'high level' objectives have been identified. As outlined above these objectives are to ensure positive effects on the range of housing solutions considered, on the use of the stock and on worklessness, and improved customer service. Further, the evaluation objectives give some indications as to the sort of impact measures which might be available nationally and locally, and in which CLG have an interest. It would also be expected that there will be other local targets set by participating organisations against which outcomes can be assessed and these may also in part reflect national expectations. However, the initial review of Trailblazers' EHO Action Plans and the findings from the scoping interviews indicate that local targets or performance indicators are unlikely to be consistent or comparable across the group of participating authorities. This has to be taken into account in the methodology of the evaluation.
13. The intention at this stage is to examine outcomes by drawing on national and local data sources where any changes over time can be compared to those changes occurring at, for example, the national, sub-national or peer group level. In considering this it needs to be recognised that some impacts of the EHO initiative may not be apparent during the evaluation period itself, may be inherently unquantifiable or, as important, may not be large enough quantitatively to be reflected in changes in the indicators chosen. In such circumstances the conclusion to be drawn is not that the impact is necessarily 'unimportant' or 'absent', but rather that it is not easily measured or measureable during the evaluation programme.
14. The issue of measuring impacts is bound up with the question of how any impacts that are identified can be ascribed to the EHO programme itself. This is considered next.

Ascribing Changes to Policy – The Question of 'Controls' and 'Context'

15. The Green Book argues that where possible the comparisons that are being made for evaluation purposes, that is comparisons between outcomes and

...they should include a 'control group', to whom the activity was not applied. It is usual to take as a benchmark for comparison what would have happened if the activity under consideration had not been implemented (paras 7.12-7.13).

16. In the case of the EHO evaluation, such controls would ideally include local authorities who are not covered by any of the variants of the EHO programme. The size of the programme suggests that there are a large number of authorities with housing responsibilities who are not participants in the programme but which will be providing some form of housing advice.
17. *Prima facie*, these form a large pool of potential controls not only for 'EHO policy on/EHO policy off' purposes in terms of outcomes but also, given the variety of authorities making up the non-participant group, for controlling for differences in such factors as Housing Advice resources, local housing and labour market pressures, and population/demography. The evaluation could then observe authorities that had participated in the programme before and after the programme, and compare these with observations at the same points in time for (a sample of) authorities that did not receive the programme – the so called 'difference-in-difference' approach to evaluation.
18. It is intended to employ elements of this approach in the evaluation of the EHO. However, the resources and timescale for the project rule out the possibility of carrying out in-depth work with non-participants to the programme. Much reliance will be placed on published data from the chosen 'control' group, the group being matched with programme participants on the basis of key characteristics of the latter. It is recognised that this approach is unlikely to result in information which can be used extensively for 'control' purposes.
19. However, it can be argued that an additional element enabling the Team to control for differences in factors affecting outcomes (and indeed inputs) is offered by the variety that exists within the group of EHO participants. Further, different types of control may be required for different evaluative purposes. Thus, in some cases it may be necessary to control for differences in the service offered to otherwise identical households in similar circumstances, or for differences in the households participating and not participating in the initiative. In other instances, it may be necessary to consider how different households react to otherwise similar information and advice. It can also be anticipated that for some forms of analysis, what will be important will be ascribing different impacts to differences in the housing option service under the four different types of EHO initiatives. At other times, the focus will be on the difference in impacts between one of these groups of authorities and all other (or 'non-participating') authorities.
20. It is important to recognise the complexities of attempting to control for the different influences of context, process, form of service delivery, and external factors on outcomes. There will often be situations requiring evaluation where there is too little data and too much 'noise' for useful results to arise

21. Given this, *realistic evaluation* is preferred. This requires that programmes be evaluated in terms of the *context* within which they operate, the *mechanisms* that lead to change and the *outcomes* that they achieve. The implication is that if the aim of the evaluation is truly formative and is intended to inform and enable the development of the policy in the future, then the most valuable approach is that which will result in enhanced knowledge of how context and (delivery) mechanisms appear to affect outcomes, positively and negatively, based on a variety, even if not strictly scientifically constructed, set of real world observations.
22. A particularly important 'contextual' issue given the timing and setting of the evaluation is the current economic climate. Both the scoping report (*Evaluation of Enhanced Housing Options Programme: Scoping Report 2009* para 1.22 *et seq*) and the literature review (*Trailblazers Policy Context and Literature Review 2009*) have highlighted this as an important concern for both EHO participants and stakeholders.
23. It could be argued that to a large extent the recession will affect all Trailblazers and potential controls and that, therefore, while all outcomes may be less significant or more (negatively) affected than might have been the case, comparisons within the Trailblazers and between the Trailblazers and the controls are unaffected. However, it is likely that the economic climate will impact differentially on different participants and controls, due to variations in, for example, the regional impact of the recession and, particularly, the degree to which EHO policies emphasise a reduction in worklessness. Even in a situation of comparatively large numbers – 42 Trailblazers and a large number, potentially, of controls – such differences are unlikely to 'net out' across these groups. Hence, in undertaking a realistic evaluation at this time, it is clear that consideration of this particular contextual element is likely to figure large.

Measuring 'Success'

24. The potential difficulties of identifying quantitative outcomes relative to targets or objectives have been noted above. However, even where outcomes can be measured, those outcomes do not in themselves indicate that the policy has been 'successful'. While potentially the subject of extended theoretical or philosophical debate, the practical issue is that even where a 'move in the right direction' can be readily identified – a reduction in homelessness, say, or an increased take up of training – the question still arises as to how much of a move constitutes a success and whether it is worthwhile to incur the costs, broadly interpreted, necessary to achieve it.
25. Here, the Green Book suggests that an evaluation requires an assessment in monetary terms of as many of the costs and benefits of a proposal as

26. The feasibility of carrying out a CBA of the EHO is discussed further in the methodology section ('Phase Five') below and will not be repeated here. Briefly, the intention is to estimate the net benefits to the public purse of Trailblazers programme, enabling an evaluation of the public sector costs of achieving the outcomes that have been identified and, where, possible the value of those outcomes. As a minimum therefore, it should be possible to evaluate outcomes in terms of '*Achieving outcome X has a resource cost (cost to the public purse) of £Y*' and in some cases in terms of '*The value of outcome X is £Z which has a resource cost (cost to the public purse) of £Y*'. It is also recognised that the 'net benefits' achieved by the Trailblazers initiative are worth something not only to the parties directly involved but also to society as a whole. The evaluation objectives refers to these wider, or indirect, benefits such as households gaining work, a reduction in crime and better health outcomes. The Team intend to investigate the scope for estimating these wider benefits.

Determining What is to be Evaluated

27. The above discussion has been couched both in terms of particular types of activity that might be measured and evaluated, comparisons between the performance of different participants, and between these and non-participants. However, there is an important difference in evaluation requirements depending on whether the object of the evaluation is seen as the EHO *programme* or specific activities undertaken under the programme. Further, it is necessary to consider the question as to whether it is the authorities that are being evaluated or particular types of initiative. While the former requires some assessment of the latter, the importance from the point of view of producing a formative evaluation is that comparisons of the performance of different types of authority participating under different EHO programmes - Extra + JCP, Extra and so on – may reflect differences in the initial national and local allocation of resources to the programme. Differences in the outcomes of a specific initiative undertaken in different authorities may reflect differences in, *inter al*:

- local context
- mechanisms/delivery design decisions
- levels and type of current service (e.g., whether the authority is 'starting from scratch' or enhancing existing provision)
- the particular groups targeted
- the measures chosen by the Trailblazers
- the specific targets set and the outcomes that are being sought

28. Much progress has already been made at this early stage of the evaluation in identifying the broad similarities and differences in the activities that participating authorities are (planning to) undertake in order to achieve both the overall objectives that CLG has set for the EHO programme and locally determined objectives. Yet this exercise, and the early scoping interviews with a smaller group of authorities (see *Evaluation of Enhanced Housing Options Programme: Scoping Report* 2009 Chapter Three) has made it clear that in seeking to achieve these objectives participants have many different starting points and priorities, and are using a wide range of approaches and methods.
29. Thus, to take the example of the objective of using the stock more effectively, some authorities are seeking to reduce unsuccessful CBL bids, others are attempting to incorporate the private rented sector into the CBL system, while the focus of the efforts of some participants is on meeting the decent homes standard or increasing void turnover rates. Some of course are undertaking more than one of these, while others are undertaking none.
30. Seen in this light, the issue can then be reduced, rather crudely, to whether the evaluation should seek to:
- identify which type(s) of initiative meet each CLG objective more successfully than other type(s) of initiative (and why): OR
 - identify which initiatives of a specific type are more successful in relation to the relevant CLG objective in some authorities than in others (and why): OR
 - which authorities have been more successful in meeting their own objectives, which are, by implication, approved through the bidding process, than others (and why)
31. Given the scale of the EHO programme and the number of initiatives proposed by participating authorities the way in which the Evaluation Team's thinking is developing at this stage is that in most cases it will be some combination of the above that will be employed. Thus, to give an example, while avoiding repeating the discussion of measuring outcomes and 'success' above, in the case of using the stock more effectively, the evaluation can proceed by asking:
- Which type of initiative most successfully achieves this objective in terms of (primarily) national indicators/measures and the public sector cost of that initiative?
 - Why does that initiative appear to be more successful in some authorities in which it has been implemented than in others?
 - What distinguishes authorities that have been 'less successful' in achieving national objectives through this initiative but 'very successful' in achieving local objectives as captured by, for example, local targets?
32. Clearly further refinement of this approach is required so that it can be successfully implemented. However, the Team is confident that by thinking in this way of the work to be done a robust evidence based evaluation can be undertaken.

Operationalising the Evaluation Framework – An Overview of the Approach

33. In order to apply the evaluation framework discussed above, it is necessary to construct a methodology through which the information needed can be collected and analysed. It is important to note that this information will not solely consist of 'hard data' (quantified measures) but will encompass 'softer', qualitative indicators of processes and outcomes reflecting the important experiences of the Trailblazers and their clients resulting from the EHO initiative.
34. The starting point for operationalising the framework is a realisation that individual Trailblazers EHO plans vary in the degree to which they reflect some or all of CLG's four 'high level' objectives, and in the specifically locally objectives that they contain. Consequently, an early requirement is for the Team to familiarise themselves with the Trailblazers' Action Plans and to identify the extent to which CLG objectives are explicitly contained within them, the nature of the local objectives that have been set, and the current intentions of the Trailblazers for monitoring the attainment of both sets of objectives.
35. Since the Trailblazers have had a significant degree of freedom in determining the objectives of their EHO initiatives, subject to approval by CLG for inclusion in the EHO programme, the evaluation exercise potentially has to deal with a great variety of aims, objectives and locally constructed targets and measures in coming to a set of conclusions which bear upon the questions raised above. Consequently it is proposed that the Team will identify a set of primarily quantitative indicators, and the sources for quantifying those indicators, which relate to CLG's high level objectives. In discussion with the Trailblazers and in the light of their Action Plans, it will be possible to 'customise' the set which will then apply to each participating authority/group of institutions.
36. The progress that the Trailblazers are making in achieving their local objectives may be judged by drawing upon the quantitative and qualitative measures that the Trailblazers themselves have determined. The Team anticipate that there will be significant scope for discussion, advice and mutually agreed 'guideline' setting between them and the Trailblazers in this respect, particularly where both the local indicators and the way in which they are to be used has not been fully defined in the Action Plans. It is therefore important that there is the opportunity for sharing 'good practice' between the Trailblazers and between the Trailblazers and the Team over what is used to identify progress, in a quantitative or qualitative sense, and how that is identified.
37. It is important to reiterate again here that the evaluation is not solely, or perhaps mainly, concerned with *what* outcomes have been achieved under the EHO programme but also *how* these have been achieved. Thus, a crucially important element of the evaluation is gaining an understanding of the process of implementing the EHO initiative(s) and the local and organisational context in which this has taken place. As a result, the gathering of quantitative information is an important, but only one part, of

Operationalising the Evaluation Framework – The Methods to be Employed

38. In order to operationalise our approach, the work has been divided into six distinct phases, with some elements taking place across more than one phase. Here we concentrate on those aspects which yield key information for the evaluation.

Phase One: Further Development of the Methodology

39. This early stage of the research will allow us to develop and improve the evaluation framework and methods outlined above in consultation with CLG and the Trailblazers. The work in this stage will include:
- Analysis of existing policy and wider literature
 - Interviews with key national stakeholders (including CLG and DWP)
 - Scoping interviews with five to six Trailblazers. These would be carried out early on in the evaluation in order to establish:
 - How far advanced the establishment of the Trailblazer is in terms of, for example, setting up services and allocating funding.
 - Main priorities in terms of, for example, target groups and use of funds.
 - The nature of the partnership Trailblazers, the role of the lead organisation, and location of services provided
 - Who they would see as being a client of the Trailblazer's service. In particular we would like to be clear on whether and how clients typically access (or are expected to access) the services.
 - An overview of existing data being collected by the Trailblazers. We will establish at this early stage exactly what data is being routinely collected by all of the Trailblazers, including client outcome monitoring, to enable quick progress to be made on establishing common outcome measurements and what assistance, if any, is required to improve local data collection to support this.
 - Commencement of mapping out targets and outcomes in the five Trailblazers with JCP. These five Trailblazers have already been selected as case studies. We can therefore start the more detailed work on mapping out targets and outcomes at an earlier stage.

Phase Two: Implementation, Emerging Issues and Early Experiences

40. This phase will focus on various forms of data identification and collection, and will incorporate the following aspects:
- **Collection of existing national level data.** This will be determined in the light of the four high level objectives of CLG and the results of the overview of existing data in Phase One.
 - **A web-based survey of all the Trailblazers.** This will collect information on:
 - The local context in which the Trailblazers are operating, including services provided by the voluntary sector, or those based outside of the Trailblazer area;
 - The priorities set by the Trailblazer in terms of targeting particular client groups;
 - Services provided by the Trailblazer, and models of delivery and governance, including links with local partners;
 - Changes to their priorities and services, and other difficulties associated with the changed economic circumstances.
 - The way in which information on clients accessing the new or enhanced services provided under the EHO initiative are recorded
 - For the Trailblazers involving more than one participant ('partnership Trailblazers'), we will need to establish early on the nature of the arrangement, and ensure that the research asks appropriate questions of the Trailblazer lead and of the constituent organisations.
 - **Initial Data audit** This will involve analysis of policy documents and data held by each of the Trailblazers, including funding arrangements, start dates and target groups, as well as any outcomes/monitoring data they are collecting. This analysis will enable us to investigate the possibility of establishing a client outcome database, based on data that is either held already, or could easily be collected.
 - **Selection of in depth case study LAs** As specified in the brief, we propose to select 15 in depth case study LAs. The rest will be 'light touch' LAs. All five of the Extra Trailblazers with JCP will be included automatically in the in-depth case study work, as requested by CLG. We propose to draw on the overview carried out in Phase One and the work described above in order to select the remaining case studies, in consultation with CLG.
 - **Mapping out case study targets and outcomes** This will involve establishing exactly what the case study areas are doing. It will build upon data collected in Phase One and in this Phase, and will include:
 - Interviews with senior project staff in each area to investigate processes surrounding the implementation and operation of the Trailblazer services. It will explore the aims and objectives, perceived mechanisms that work, barriers to success and how they might be overcome.

- An audit of existing management data in order to establish its robustness and usefulness. This will involve developing bespoke outcome measures relating to, particularly, local objectives as well as a range of quantitative and qualitative indicators to be used to assess success in delivering target outcomes.
- **Development of client database.** Following on from the results of Phase One, we will at this stage work with the Trailblazers to develop systems for monitoring client outcomes. These will build upon systems that are already in place, as indicated through the web based survey for example. The systems will be designed so as not to impose too much extra work on the part of Trailblazers while maximising the usefulness of the data that they do collect, both for their own monitoring purposes, and for the purposes of our evaluation.

Phase Three: Commencing Client Interviews, Tracking Clients and Further Data Collection

41. This Phase will see the commencement of client interviews and client tracking, while collecting additional data from the Trailblazers. It will seek to explore the views and experiences of the client group for whom the Trailblazers were designed. We would aim to interview 640 clients across the eight Trailblazers. The target number of interviews allows for a total of 50% attrition after 12 months.
42. Client Interviews. Before commencing interviews we will draw on any locally held data to explore the profile of the housing options' clients. We will clarify carefully, in consultation with the Trailblazers, who exactly are their clients. In particular, we will consider whether people who inquire about services by phone, or by using the internet, should be considered as "clients". We are envisaging that most clients will visit in person, but could adjust our methods if this was not the case. We will use information on the demographic profile of the clients, as well as their route of contact, to ensure that our sample of clients to be tracked is broadly representative of the range of clients. The clients to be tracked will probably be approached directly face-to-face by one of our team when they visit the housing options service (e.g. the local authority housing department, one-stop shop, or wherever the housing options services is based). We will work closely with the Trailblazers to enlist their support with this work.
43. Our previous experience of this kind of work suggests that follow up success rates are greatly increased by building up some rapport with the individual interviewee so that they remember meeting the interviewer when they are contacted for follow-up. We would therefore plan to carry out brief telephone/email interviews after two months, with further follow-ups at six and 12 month periods. If there has been a major life event for the client a full interview will be arranged. The follow up interview will enable the interviewer to construct with the client a map of their route through the different services over the past few months to show how the support offered through housing options has impacted upon other aspects of their lives. We will also draw on the data held by the Trailblazers on all their clients and compare it to the data we collect on those who are interviewed in order to

44. Specifically, through the client interviews we will seek to measure:
- Current housing situation, and any changes since the last contact;
 - Current employment/training situation and any changes since the last contact;
 - Less direct indicators of closeness to the labour market, such as childcare issues, debt management, addressing of drug or alcohol problems, health;
 - Any further contact with the Housing options service, what services offered and what accessed, and impact of this contact;
 - Any contact with any other agencies since last contact with us;
 - Any other major life changes (criminal conviction, relationship end, etc that might impact upon ability to gain or sustain employment or a tenancy);
 - Overall views of the housing options service and perceived benefits of the service for them on personal level.
45. Clients who do not follow up on the advice given to them by the Housing Options team will be included in the sample. This would help to reveal any areas where the service may be not be providing the help needed, and will also improve our understanding about why people choose not to follow through with the advice and what happens to people who lose contact with the services.
46. Clients of a housing options service are, by definition, likely to be experiencing unstable housing and quite often other associated difficulties in their lives. This makes them a particularly challenging group to track as they may change address frequently or live rather chaotic lives. We plan to maximise the response rate by:
- Taking as many means of re-contact as possible (mobile phone number, email, address, their mother's phone number, social worker, etc);
 - Establishing face to face contact at the initial interview stage;
 - Assigning one researcher to carry out the interviews in each location. It would generally be this same researcher who they have met who re-contacts them;
 - Offering a £10 high street shopping voucher as a thank-you to all those who attend the initial interview, who attend a follow-up interview, or who remain in contact for the duration of the project (i.e. respond to the 12 month follow up phone call). We have used incentives such as these in previous research and find them to work particularly well with young, low-income client groups.
47. Mapping clients' journeys will be undertaken by using a life history calendar method to construct maps of people's journeys through the housing options services. The life history calendar is proposed here as tool to help understand the factors that lead people both in and out of housing difficulties. It involves

48. Tracking clients involves a number of sampling issues. It is particularly important that the clients to be tracked are representative of the client group. We also wish to ensure coverage of the PSA 16 client groups. The PSA focuses on four at-risk client groups, who may be negotiating a difficult transition point. These four groups are:
- Care leavers
 - Adult offenders under probation supervision
 - Adults in contact with secondary mental health services
 - Adults with moderate to severe learning disabilities.
49. We would first work with any data that the Trailblazers hold to establish the numbers of each of these groups who they work with and any data they hold on them. We would then ensure that we established during interview whether the client fell into any of these groups. If we needed to increase the numbers of any of the groups there are two possible approaches that could be taken: We could use filtering questions to establish whether anyone falls into any of these groups, selecting only those that do for interview; or we could work closely with the Trailblazers to establish good ways to reach these groups. This may be necessary if the numbers are too small for us to find them easily within the general client group. We will also work closely with the Trailblazer to establish whether there are particular needs that some of these groups may have in order to participate in the research (eg being interviewed with a advocate or carer) and to ensure that we comply with data protection and confidentiality guidelines. This applies mainly to those with mental health difficulties and learning disabilities. For those with severe disabilities it may be more appropriate to carry out the interview directly with a carer.
50. Collection of baseline data on core outcomes will also commence during this phase in all Trailblazers.
51. A detailed data audit for the 15 case study Trailblazers will be carried out once we have scoped out the nature of each Trailblazer. We will carry out further work to map out the additional specific targets and outcomes set by the case study LAs. We will collect data to establish how well the core outcome measures established are being met. This will include:
- Analysis of existing data, both national and locally held;
 - Interviews with frontline staff offering the Trailblazers service;

- Interviews with other key local agencies, such as the JobCentre plus, hostels and other voluntary sector housing providers and CAB.

52. This enables us to map out the additional specific targets and outcomes that have been set by case study Trailblazers in order to develop a set of bespoke outcome measures for each Trailblazer. We will then use this information to establish a range of quantitative and qualitative measures of success in achieving the desired outcomes. We will also establish the quality of the management, financial, and monitoring data that is being collected, and make recommendations of where this could be enhanced or extra data that could be collected. The research will also explore how the EHO initiatives in the selected sample of Trailblazers are impacting on national indicators. A further aspect of this stage of the work will be to examine the roles played by mentoring and mentored Trailblazers. We will explore the benefits this arrangement can bring and would hope to draw conclusions about what factors lead to the most successful relationships.

Phase Four: Further In-depth Work in the Case Studies

53. The tracking of clients which commenced in Phase Three will continue throughout Phase Four of the project.
54. A key element here will be exploring why potential client groups do not use the services, which involves understanding how well the housing options services are perceived by the potential client groups. We will explore these by holding two focus groups in each of the case study LAs that are included in the client interviews and tracking programme. Focus groups will give us the opportunity to explore the issues in more depth, in a cost-effective manner. We will cooperate with other local agencies, who we will have made contact with earlier in the research, to seek participants who are in roughly similar circumstances to Trailblazers clients, but have not made use of the EHO services. The main focus would be on people facing housing related problems within the context of wider difficulties (such as unemployment). One of these will be directed at DWP clients who have had some experience of housing difficulties over the past year, recruited via JobCentres. The other focus group will be held with people experiencing housing difficulties recruited via general advertising and/or local agencies working with this group (e.g. hostels). These focus groups would explore the extent of local knowledge, what the participants' needs and preferences are in terms of housing options, and what other needs, such as finding work or debt management, they are experiencing. This would help the Trailblazers to evaluate the success of promoting their work to the relevant client groups, as well as contributing to our understanding of the local context in which the Trailblazers are operating.

Phase Five: Analysis

55. The tracking of clients commenced in Phase Three would continue throughout this Phase of the project. We will also analyse the existing data collected at this stage. This analytical Phase involves a number of activities:
- **Collection of latest outcomes data.** The latest data on client outcomes would be collated and analysed at this stage. This will involve analysis of both the administrative data held by the Trailblazers, and the data that we have collected as part of the client interview/tracking process. The analysis of the Trailblazers administrative data will also draw on wider sources of data on aggregate figures such as employment data, and national level data on housing management (such as void figures). The discussion of the evaluation framework above indicates that making comparisons between places is difficult because housing systems, job opportunities and demographics vary considerably between areas. Further, making comparisons over time is also problematic due to changing economic circumstances. However, by looking both over time and between places, it is possible to form some tentative conclusions on the outcomes attributable to the Enhanced Housing Options Programmes. Changes in outcome measures from the Trailblazers can be compared to changes in non-Trailblazer areas. It will also be possible to look at whether there are identifiable differences between the different types of Trailblazers, and to consider whether there are identifiable differences in circumstances where they do and do not appear to be having an impact on key outcome measures.
 - **Analysis of client interview data.** The client interview data will enable the Team to relate the outcomes achieved by participants to both their experience of service use and their experiences more generally as captured by our interviews and proposed life history calendar approach. It will also be important to draw together any information relating to individual clients that may have been captured from local authority records in order to augment and add depth to the data that Phase Three of the research has collected.
56. The envisaged approach should, through the linking of client interview and other outcome data, enable the direct linking of outcomes to the characteristics and experiences of participants over three different participation stages. It is likely to require an additional step in the use of the interview and life calendar data involving 'recoding' into quantitative measures, which will frequently reflect rankings or qualitative or binary variables. The subsequent database would then provide a set of variables for use in appropriate statistical analysis.
57. Whether such data manipulation is feasible or desirable depends on the degree to which both meaningful and tractable summary categorisations of outcomes, experiences and characteristics can be constructed. Even so, some outcomes - for example, whether a participant is in work at the end of the evaluation period having being workless at the outset - can be readily categorised and some of the data on household characteristics would, we anticipate, be comparatively easy to quantify. Thus, whether or not our subsequent discussions indicate a wish on CLG's part to attempt a 'full scale'

58. Drawing both on existing administrative data and on the staff interviews we will construct maps of the routes people take through the housing options service. We have recently been producing models of this type in the work we are carrying out for CLG into housing assistance for adults fleeing domestic violence. We have found that in many LAs it is common for this group to go first through the housing options service, only requiring statutory homeless assistance when this fails. We have produced a model of the routes that they may take through the system, and are currently modifying this to the local circumstances of our case study LAs. The models help to clarify what can be a complex mixture of different service provision designed to meet differing needs. We will use the understanding we have developed in this project to apply to the Trailblazers.
59. Measuring the costs and cost benefits associated with the EHO initiative. An important part of the research is to provide evidence on the cost effectiveness of the range of housing options approaches and to be able to compare these with alternative models of provision. We propose as part of our research to estimate a cost benefit model that will enable the government to assess the relative value of this approach to the public purse. There is a considerable amount of guidance available on how best to measure value for money through cost benefit processes. Two key sources are the Treasury Green Book and the CLG/ Treasury Three Rs Guidance. A number of evaluations undertaken for CLG in recent years have adopted an approach where the costs of the programme concerned have been measured as its net additional exchequer costs to the public sector. The benefits side of the account has then been expressed as the additional outputs/ outcomes that the programme has produced. In some cases the net outputs improvements have been expressed in volume units but in other cases a monetary valuation has been assigned.
60. The services provided by the Trailblazers will result in outcomes that relate to housing access, use of the housing stock and related factors, such as the impact on worklessness. If the Trailblazers approach to delivery is superior to other ways of delivering the services concerned then it may well be able to generate higher levels of these outcomes compared to other methods of delivery and the extra benefits associated with the Trailblazer initiative need to be identified. A difficult area is to evaluate the net benefits of enhanced take up of benefits and other government payments in relation to outputs and outcomes.
61. Improvements in the quality of housing provision, housing use and access, as well as benefits to an individual from improved labour market outcomes, can lead both to increases and reductions in public expenditure in a number of ways. Better use of the housing stock and reduced voids may mean less expenditure by the public sector (and the voluntary sector). Less worklessness and thus fewer people requiring benefit and more people paying taxes are also examples. These are financial gains to the public sector and should be considered in seeking to strike the true cost to the public

62. We will draw upon this research to assist us in deriving an evaluation of the net benefits to the public purse for the Trailblazers programme. We will seek to ensure that the account enables comparison with other approaches to delivery where this is possible, seeking to net out those elements of cost that are associated with other providers like the voluntary sector as well as apportioning the various elements of costs to the relevant individual public provider.
63. The research methodology that we intend to employ is designed to establish the additionality of the initiative. These additional outcomes may take some time to unfold. It will thus be necessary to establish the relevant timescales. One way forward is to assess the probabilities of outcomes being maintained based on household and other characteristics. This will allow future net benefits to be measured – within wide confidence intervals. These can then be discounted using Treasury discount rates to measure net present values.
64. The discussion above relates to identifying the costs and benefits associated with the Trailblazer initiative from the perspective of public sector finances. It is, however, important to recognise that the outcomes achieved by the Trailblazers initiative are worth something not only to the individuals who receive them but also to society as a whole. How these wider benefits, such as people gaining work, reduced crime and better health outcomes, should be quantified is discussed at length in the Treasury Green Book. The researchers will investigate the scope for estimating these benefits associated with the Trailblazers initiative drawing on the research that has been undertaken.

Phase Six: Development of Good Practice Toolkit

65. The production of Good Practice Toolkit is the final output from this research. However, we envisage that elements of good practice – and also any identified solutions to 'bad practice' or problems encountered – would form part of the feedback process that will be ongoing throughout the research, feeding into the learning workshops and being posted on the our interactive website.
66. We also offer a well-established interactive web-based facility (Camtools) run by Cambridge University and freely available to staff. This will allow us to establish a dedicated virtual space for sharing information and early findings. It provides a set of tools to ease co-ordination and sharing of resources

67. We would wish to encourage local authorities and partners to engage with this website not only as a source of information but because it has a resource whereby views and ideas can be exchanged between users. Because it is interactive it could serve as a forum for emerging good practice, in advance of bringing all the examples together in the form of a final Toolkit.
68. While the detailed structure of such a Toolkit will depend on the findings of the research and will be discussed and agreed with CLG, a suggestion is that it could include separate sections as follows:
- National policy context (basically for background, but necessary also as policy changes and develops);
 - Local policy objectives (what is expected from the enhanced options);
 - Delivery vehicles (the different agencies that are delivering the enhanced options);
 - Processes in terms of how delivery is organised and what is expected to happen;
 - Outcomes in terms of meeting objectives (e.g. fall in homelessness applications, etc.);
 - Outcomes in terms of customer experience (journey maps);
69. Each section would include a framework of what appears to be the best practice, with examples from the best practice authorities. The emphasis would be positive, rather than labelling 'bad practice', although challenging issues and potential pitfalls could be highlighted and solutions offered.
70. These ideas would be 'tested' on the Camtools website as they emerged from the research, with a facility for feedback in terms of whether authorities found them useful. Information from the Camtools site will be shared with CLG either after seeking permission from the Trailblazers themselves, or anonymising it. We would also engage with the mentoring process that has been set up to help identify the key elements of advice and support that the mentored Trailblazers found most helpful.

Crosscutting work: Providing an Iterative Process of Feedback to the Trailblazers

71. A final element of action research allows the benefits of the evaluation to feed back into the development of enhanced housing options services. It will ensure that lessons are being learned as we go along, and allow Trailblazers to share best practice and develop further than they otherwise might in the two year time span. We envisage holding a learning workshop at three points during the evaluation (at approximately six, 12 and 18 months into the evaluation). These will allow us to share the findings of the evaluation as they emerge. They will also help us to develop our understanding of the issues by hearing from the Trailblazers about the different issues they are facing.

Conclusions

72. In conclusion, then, the approach to be taken in the evaluation of the EHO initiative is a formative one that places emphasis on the context and delivery mechanisms employed by the Trailblazers, and the outcomes emerging from the programme. This is a major undertaking, given the variety in the precise objectives that the Trailblazers have set themselves, the methods they are employing to achieve those objectives and the different periods over which the outcomes are likely to emerge. Further, as we have noted, the current economic climate may impact directly on the outcomes achieved from Trailblazer activities focused primarily on the reduction of worklessness.
73. In recognition of this, the evaluation has drawn up a methodology that addresses the complexity of the EHO activities and the settings in which they are taking place. Key elements include the collection of data over the course of the evaluation which relate to the national objectives that have been set for the programme and intensive data collection at the local level from both participating organisations and from clients in the case study authorities. Analysis of these data sets and of the 'softer', qualitative information gathered as part of the evaluation will enable the (anticipated) variety in outcomes to be identified and the mechanisms and activities that lead to these differing outcomes to be highlighted. Further, we expect to make progress towards evaluating the EHO initiative from the perspective of the cost to the public sector of achieving at least some of the outcomes that the evaluation identifies. This will enable policy makers to incorporate broad 'value for money' considerations into their any subsequent deliberations concerning the extension or intensification of the EHO programme.
74. Finally, it is important to re-emphasise that the evaluation of the EHO is not a one way process. Being a formative evaluation, the importance of feedback and good practice dissemination between the Team and the Trailblazers, and between the Trailblazers themselves, facilitated by the Team and the evaluation website, is recognised and is central to our approach. In this way, it is intended that the evaluation will benefit participants as well as those concerned with policy design.