

# Expanding Choice, Addressing Need

Addressing Housing Need through the Enhanced Housing Options Approach



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# Ministerial Foreword

In the 21st century, social housing must offer more than a roof over people's heads. It must be a service which promotes progress and independence through genuine opportunity. It must be tailored to people's individual needs and responsive to changes in their circumstances.

Often the local authority is the first port of call for those seeking housing support. People need effective advice and information about all the options open to them – not just about social housing, but about renting in the private sector or low cost home ownership. I also want to see housing services becoming more outward facing – working more effectively with other services to help address the root causes of people's housing need.

This more holistic service is already available to those at risk of becoming homeless. They aren't just offered a bed for the night, but anything from family mediation to help with rent deposits – whatever will help prevent them becoming homeless and address the underlying issues. This has had major success in preventing homelessness – but also helping people into stable housing and to live independent lives. I believe there are lessons to be learned here across housing services more broadly. And I want to see the same quality and breadth of advice and support open to everyone with a housing need.

Many authorities are already starting to develop these more integrated services, through a 'housing options' approach which offers both broader housing advice and better links to employment advice. Several examples are outlined in this document.

But I believe that there is scope to develop these services far more widely. That is why I am launching this pilot programme, inviting 15 authorities to test out the new approach. Five local authorities already working in this way will be able to take their services to the next level, while mentoring other authorities to accelerate improvement. And 10 will have the opportunity to kickstart this way of working. There will be a particular emphasis on the links between housing and employment advice, because of the clear relationship between unemployment and housing need.

This is a chance for local authorities to be really ambitious – reshaping their housing services to really benefit local people. I am looking for innovative and creative bids which will deliver genuine improvements in results. I hope many of you will rise to this challenge.



**RT Hon Caroline Flint MP**  
Minister for Housing and Planning

# 1

## Introduction

**The Enhanced Housing Options Approach is a new way of providing housing advice which empowers clients and transforms lives.**

John Hills' review on the future role of social housing in England, published in February 2007, highlighted the success of the 'housing options approach' in preventing homelessness, and also praised other 'choice-based' services such as Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) schemes. He saw the value in services which "treat those in need of housing support in a more adult way... moving towards a system where people make more of their own choices from a wider range of options, providing support when people need it".

He suggested that the excellent work already being carried out by many local authorities around the provision of housing advice and support could form the baseline for more holistic 'enhanced' housing options services, offering advice around a wider range of issues to a wider audience.

The housing options approach fundamentally transforms the way that those in housing need interact with providers of housing advice. It empowers people by giving them information and advice about the options and services available and enables them to make informed decisions. The scope for the development of housing options services, and the application of the housing options approach, is vast.

Many local authorities have developed effective housing options services and are already realising the benefits. However, there is scope to do a lot more. To promote an 'enhanced' housing options approach, Communities and Local Government is inviting bids from local authorities for two programmes of 'trailblazers.' The first programme of five trailblazers in 2008/09 is for local authorities interested in further enhancing their already strong housing options services and becoming 'mentors' to disseminate good practice. The second programme to run in 2009/10 is for 10 trailblazers keen to develop enhanced housing options services with guidance and support from the mentoring authorities. Our two trailblazer programmes will run with a view to developing a 'tool kit' of good practice, to be disseminated to all local authorities.

In funding a series of housing options trailblazer programmes, Communities and Local Government is committed to supporting, monitoring and evaluating an enhanced housing options approach, and disseminating good practice.

This document outlines our vision for enhanced housing options services, and sets out how the trailblazer programmes will operate. There are case studies throughout of particularly impressive services which are already developing along enhanced housing options lines.



## 2 Current Context

In an era of poor affordability in the private sector, many people come to the local authority for advice on how to find a home that is right for them – often looking to the social sector to meet their housing needs. Addressing the high demand for affordable homes has become a key government priority. In recognition of this demand we are investing £8bn in new affordable housing over the next three years and will be providing 70,000 new affordable homes per annum by 2010/11.

However, it will take time for this investment to have an impact – and there are people who need homes now. There is a greater range of options available to customers than ever before, a complex landscape which may be difficult to navigate without assistance. It is therefore important that everyone in housing need gets accessible, good quality advice at the right time about what their options are, what they can realistically expect, and what they can do to improve their chances of achieving the home they need.

Government is also committed to addressing poverty and worklessness. We know that many households' housing problems arise from a lack of a livelihood, and also that many people enter social housing without skills or a job. Enhanced housing options services that connect people with advice and support about skills, in-work benefits and jobs can help set people on the path into work, and ensure social housing provides a genuine platform for opportunity.



## 3 Addressing Housing Need through Housing Options

Housing options advice has a crucial role to play in addressing urgent housing need. But housing options advice should not just be for people in the most acute need. Without positive interventions, housing problems may worsen over time – so there is a strong argument for offering housing options advice to people before they reach crisis point<sup>1</sup>.

Housing problems often indicate other underlying issues. A lack of employment, training or skills; poor finance and debt management; confusion about appropriate benefits; drug and alcohol misuse; mental or physical health problems, and problems associated with transitional phases from and between services such as prison or care can all lead to difficulties in owning a home or sustaining a tenancy. To deliver a sustainable solution, housing options advice requires a holistic assessment of the wider causes of housing need, and links to other types of advice and support in an effort to tackle the root causes of the housing problem.

Communities and Local Government would like to see a wider range of advice being provided across a wider range of clients, including those in the private rented sector, owner occupiers, vulnerable and socially excluded adults, and other traditionally hard-to-reach groups.

We would also like to see local authorities working with partners to develop enhanced options services which respond to local priorities and targets in the Local Area Agreement. The Local Authority indicator set includes indicators relating to: diversity, worklessness, young people who are NEET (not in employment, education or training), support and fair treatment for older people, satisfaction with home and neighbourhood, substance misuse, support for vulnerable and socially excluded adults into settled accommodation and independent living, number of affordable homes delivered, number of people on benefits, and number of households in temporary accommodation. An enhanced housing options service offers an excellent way for a local authority to join up advice and support to key groups and underpin the meeting of local targets.

<sup>1</sup> Under s166(1) of the Housing Act 1996 all authorities must make available, free of charge, advice and information about the right to make an application for an allocation of housing.



## London Borough of Southwark

### Housing Services through Housing Options

Southwark has adopted a housing options approach in all its customer-adviser interactions, offering real and valid solutions in a client-focused, friendly manner.

Southwark's Choice-Based lettings scheme promotes a number of alternatives to waiting for a social property, including schemes to promote and sustain tenancies in the growing private sector.

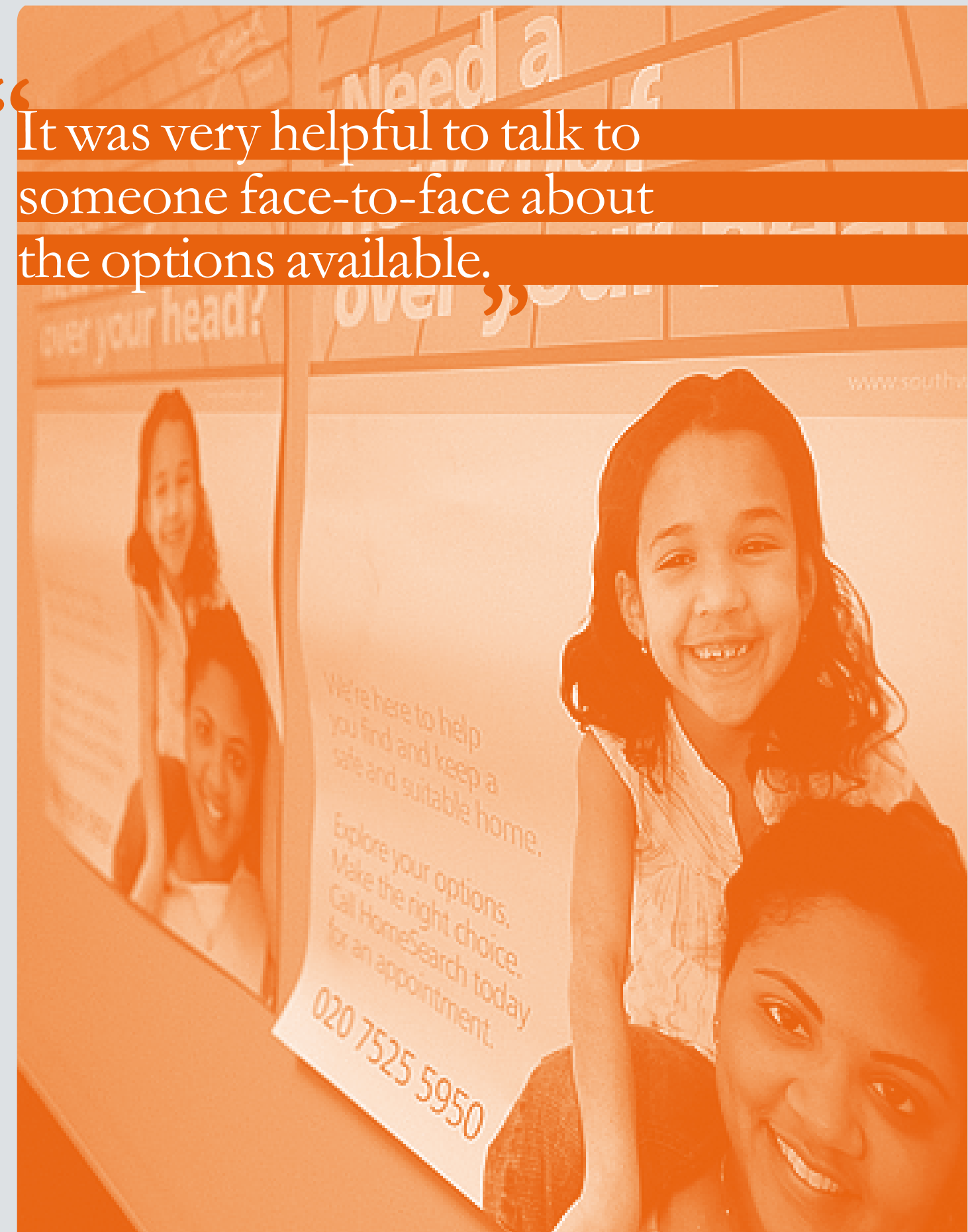
Throughout 2007, Community Housing Services held three all-day housing options themed events for households in Temporary Accommodation (TA). These events proved to be a huge success in providing tenants in TA with the opportunity to 'browse' a number of information stalls and receive quality advice from advisers on their re-housing options and support to 'bid' via the Homesearch Choice-Based Lettings scheme. One comment:

"It was very helpful to talk to someone face-to-face about the options available."

Southwark has recently completed a refurbishment of its Bournemouth Road site into a new housing options HomeSearch centre, bringing all housing services together into a single point of contact for clients in housing need. Southwark has begun to 'enhance' its options service by offering bookable debt advice surgeries, and is now working with the Economic Development Service to link access to employment advice directly to the HomeSearch Centre.

The housing options service in Southwark is supported by a telephone advice line which sees advisers dealing with in-depth cases via the telephone, including liaising with private landlords and families in homeless cases, referrals to other services and schemes and general advice on housing applications to the authority.

"It was very helpful to talk to someone face-to-face about the options available."



## 4

## Housing Options, Choice-Based Lettings and HomeBuy Agents

Choice-Based Lettings (CBL) is a transparent method for allocating social housing in which home seekers play a proactive part. Rather than being allocated a social home which may not be appropriate or desirable for them, applicants 'bid' for advertised properties. The successful applicant is the bidder with the greatest priority, according to the Local Authority's allocation scheme<sup>2</sup>. Applicants receive feedback after each bid which helps them assess how long they will have to wait in their chosen areas for the option of their choice (even though some may find this disappointing).

CBL schemes use a broad range of media to provide information to customers. Properties can be viewed via interactive digital television (DigiTV), websites accessed via desktop computers, laptops and mobile phones, telephone lines, weekly magazines and face-to-face advisers in shop-front premises.

CBL fits well with an enhanced housing options approach. CBL can be an effective mechanism for making wider

housing options available to a broad client group. Some CBL schemes have already begun developing as 'housing options hubs,' building on their sophisticated infrastructure and high profile among local communities to offer private rented sector and low cost home ownership properties alongside social homes.

HomeBuy Agents (HBAs) play an important role in providing advice for people for whom a shared ownership property may be the best answer. HBAs manage and administer the Government's Low Cost Home Ownership scheme (LCHO) 'HomeBuy,' identifying potential purchasers for the Government's LCHO products and supporting them through the process of purchasing a property.

We would expect local authorities to consider how best to integrate CBL services and those of Homebuy agents in an enhanced housing options service.

<sup>2</sup> Which must comply with statutory reasonable preference requirements under the Housing Act 1996

## Colchester HomeChoice

Choice-Based Lettings as a 'building block' for housing options services

Colchester's Choice-Based Lettings scheme HomeChoice@Colchester is a partnership between Colchester Borough Council, Colchester Borough Homes (ALMO) and seven other housing associations. During the development of the scheme in 2005, many of the housing associations closed their registers and a common housing register was developed. Almost all housing association and council properties are now advertised through the scheme.



Properties are advertised on the scheme's website, and in a newsletter which is emailed widely to a range of voluntary and statutory organisations. Colchester have an 'open plan estate agency' style lettings shop where the properties available are advertised in the window. The HomeChoice shop contains computers for the public to use, and is staffed by Housing Advisers meaning clients can either come in

and bid for properties on their own, or talk about their housing issues and ask for assistance. Colchester Borough Council also has a customer service centre, with staff who have been trained to use the system so that they are able to place bids on clients' behalf.

Many clients on the register have relatively low priority and are unlikely to be successful in bidding for a social home. For these clients, the scheme offers advice on a wider range of other housing options such as low cost home ownership, mutual exchange and private rented accommodation. Information is available in the shop and by telephone, and appointments can be made to see Housing Advisers for more in-depth interviews, which include financial and benefits advice.

To develop the Choice-Based Lettings scheme further Colchester has joined with seven other local authorities in the Greater Haven Gateway region to develop a sub-regional choice based lettings scheme where the aim is for customers to be able to move across boundaries should they wish to. The sub-regional scheme will include housing options, shared ownership, mutual exchange and private landlords incorporated into the scheme.



## 5

## How Could Enhanced Housing Options Make a Difference?

An enhanced housing options approach has the potential to be widely applied, with enhanced housing options services making a difference in a number of areas. In their role as strategic leaders for the area, local authorities will be working with a range of partners to achieve outcomes set out in their Local Area Agreement. Housing has a key role to play in support of outcomes across a range of areas including tackling worklessness and poverty, and addressing social exclusion. Housing options services enhanced by links to training and employment advice, in-work benefits, financial management and other life skills can be effective in achieving these targets.

- » Economic stability and prosperity has seen more home owners than ever before, but high house prices have also seen worsening affordability. Many people know that social housing offers a low cost alternative, but housing options services can also take them through the merits of other options such as **low cost home ownership products, intermediate rent, social housing and the private rented sector.**
- » Local authorities have a target to **halve the number of households in temporary accommodation** by 2010. Achieving this target will

require a continued emphasis on homelessness prevention, moving interventions away from the point of housing crisis and addressing the wider causes of housing need. In offering housing options advice to people in low and medium housing need and referring them to appropriate support services, housing crises can be averted before people become homeless.

- » Communities and Local Government expects all 354 local authorities in England to have moved towards a choice-based lettings scheme by 2010. This will mean an increasing number of people taking crucial housing decisions for the first time, and perhaps also realising that they are unlikely to get a social home in the short term. In offering options in the private rented sector and low cost home ownership alongside those in the social sector, Choice-Based Lettings can present people with another way to find the home that is right for them – this should be integrated with advice to ensure customers understand the pros and cons of each option.
- » There is an increasing appreciation of the often complex causes behind housing need – for example the interrelationship between housing and employment problems – and



the subsequent need to tackle this need holistically. Enhanced housing options services would not only assess realistically a person's chance of getting the housing option of their choice, but also help them to improve their chances of retaining that home. This will require partnership working with other support services (eg debt advice, Job Seeker Direct, mental health services, social services).

- » Government has a commitment to ensuring that the most vulnerable and socially excluded adults are offered the chance to get back on track. The Local Government Performance Framework includes indicators on: ex-offenders; care leavers; people with moderate to severe learning disabilities and those in contact with secondary mental health services. Enhanced housing options advice linked to wider advice and support services can underpin work with vulnerable or socially excluded customers, and help them access settled accommodation, education, training and employment.
- » There are an increasing number of older people in our society. There will be 2.4 million additional older households by 2026 and many more lone older households. Many older people have to make complex decisions about their housing as they

get older. This might be deciding whether to stay put or move home to other mainstream or specialised housing, and may also involve interdependent decisions about finance, benefits, care and other areas. Enhanced housing options services could provide information and support in these areas and referrals to specialised advice where appropriate. These could, for example, deliver better outcomes for older people, prevent costly health and care problems and support choice for downsizing or maintaining independence in existing housing.

- » Enhanced housing options services could be used to advise on ways of tackling overcrowding. Tenants or home seekers who face a long wait for a larger social home in their chosen area can be given advice on other options such as: mutual exchanges; private rented sector properties; and ways of mitigating overcrowding. Housing options services can also proactively run schemes to identify and suggest under-occupiers who wish to downsize.
- » Enhanced housing options services could also give advice to existing social tenants who wish to move to other areas of the country and are unsure of the options open to them.

## London Borough of Greenwich

### Housing Options Outreach Services for Socially Excluded Adults

Working closely with the Resettlement Service at Belmarsh prison, Greenwich is setting up a regular monthly 'housing options' clinic at Belmarsh.

Local authority housing options officers will meet with prisoners due for release to help with options advice and begin assessment if they are potentially homeless. The housing options service currently produces an options pack for use in the resettlement clinic for recently-released prisoners, and an information

leaflet for prisoners at the start of their sentence on the implications of both keeping or surrendering their current tenancy. A 'virtual team' of workers based in housing, probation and drug intervention programmes aims to identify prisoners with housing and support needs and assist them into accommodation, sometimes using a specially developed rent deposit scheme.

“The housing options service currently produces an options pack for use in the resettlement clinic for recently released prisoners.”

# 6

## Enhanced Housing Options Outcomes

Communities and Local Government has an ambitious vision for the future of housing options services. While we recognise that local needs and circumstances will vary, we would like to see all local authorities and their partners continue their journey towards comprehensive, customer-focused housing options services that deliver results around four key outcomes:

### 1. Meeting housing need with a wider range of solutions

In being made aware of the full range of options on offer, people are encouraged to consider solutions that they may not have thought of previously – solutions which may in fact meet their needs better than the more 'mainstream' offers. But raising people's awareness will only go so far towards meeting housing need. Some groups of customers will have very few options available to them in the first place – so local authorities will need to engage proactively with accredited private landlords to actively create new options for these groups.

### 2. Using stock more effectively

Some people might be able to stay in their current home if adaptations are made to it. Others might need to move – but there may not be properties available that match their

needs. Others may wish to move outside their local authority area, but are not sure how to do this. Using stock more effectively means making better matches between people and properties – including considering the use of other sectors where there is little chance of a feasible solution within the social sector, and encouraging mobility where possible.

### 3. Tackling worklessness

Housing and employment go hand in hand. Sometimes the lack of a job will stop someone getting the home they want – and the anxiety caused by the lack of a stable home will make it hard to think about finding work. Bringing housing and employment advice together is one way to tackle worklessness among those in housing need and in the next generation of social tenants.

### 4. Improving customer service

Services designed with customers in mind are clear, timely, accessible, transparent and relevant, providing a positive customer experience and dispelling negative myths about local authority housing services and allocations schemes. Developing such services might include working with partner organisations to develop services for specific groups.



Indicators of Success

It may be useful for local authorities to consider the following indicators when assessing whether enhanced housing options outcomes are being realised through enhanced housing options services:

Meeting housing need with a wider range of solutions
Number of homelessness applications and acceptances; number of accredited PRS landlords; number of overcrowded households reduced; take-up of rent deposits; number of clients sign-posted to low cost home ownership advice; take-up of service; take-up of outreach services; percentage of vulnerable people achieving and maintaining independent living, and the proportion of socially excluded adults living in settled accommodation
Using stock more effectively
Number of overcrowded households; percentage of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living; number of households choosing to downsize; number of households moving across local authority boundaries; number of unsuccessful or unrealistic CBL bids; void rates and turnover of voids
Tackling worklessness
Take-up of better-off calculations; take-up of in-work benefits; housing benefit case-load; take-up of Job Seeker Direct services; employment levels; number of socially excluded adults in employment, education or training.
Improving customer service
Number of people rating the service as 'good' or 'excellent;' number of people acting on advice given by the service; evidence of fair treatment by local authorities.

London Borough of Barnet  
Developing Housing Options to Tackle Overcrowding

Barnet has recruited the services of Private Lettings Negotiators to acquire family-sized properties in the private sector, both within their boundary and outside London.

An officer visits overcrowded families and discusses the range of housing options available to them and takes forward requests on a casework basis. Since April 2007, the visiting officer has visited over 100 overcrowded households and rehoused 10 of these

into suitable private sector tenancies using either of Barnet's two private sector schemes. Households have also been assisted with bidding for an appropriate social rented home or have had their overcrowding problem resolved through other means.

Numerous households have been prevented from becoming homeless and going into temporary accommodation through this early intervention approach.

“Numerous households have been prevented from becoming homeless and going into temporary accommodation through this early intervention approach.”



“For the first time Rachel can be independent and hopefully in the future will be able to make a cup of tea thanks to the wheelchair adapted kitchen.”

## HomeChoice by Erimus Housing

A Housing Options Approach by a Voluntary Transfer Organisation

Erimus Housing is a not-for-profit large-scale voluntary transfer organisation, which was set up to take ownership and management of the housing stock from Middlesbrough Council in November 2004. Erimus is also the largest provider of social housing in Middlesbrough.

The services delivered from Erimus' HomeChoice centre include Choice-Based-Lettings (CBL), Disabled Persons' Housing Service (DPHS) and the Customer Contact Centre. The Homeless, Housing Needs & Advice provision is also delivered from HomeChoice following the contracting out of this service in 2004.

Mr Parker approached Erimus Housing HomeChoice service in October 2006 to request suitable accommodation due to his daughter's disability.

The Assessment Liaison Officer, Allyson Blackburn, who works for the DPHS, involved the in-house Occupational Therapist in the assessment, which identified the type of property that would meet the family's long-term housing needs.

The DPHS continued to update Mr Parker about properties that became available, resulting in an offer of accommodation, which was subsequently refused as his daughter's condition had deteriorated. A further assessment was carried out and it was established that an accessible property to accommodate a wheelchair would be required.

In February 2008, Mr Parker was nominated for a new build two-bedroom bungalow with Endeavour Housing Association. This was managed through a close working partnership with Endeavour who regularly updated Erimus on progress with their adapted properties.

On speaking to Mr Parker and his daughter Rachel, Mr Parker said, "I am over the moon with my new home and I would not have known about these properties if it wasn't for Erimus Housing. For the first time Rachel can be independent and hopefully in the future will be able to make a cup of tea thanks to the wheelchair adapted kitchen."



# 7

## Principles of an Enhanced Housing Options Approach

Many local authorities have already begun to adopt an enhanced housing options approach in delivering housing services, using a range of innovative business models to address local need. Despite varying models, the most successful services are underpinned by some common principles which facilitate an outcomes-based approach.

» **Innovation:** some customers will be harder to house than others. It takes innovation and creativity to find ways of preventing these people experiencing acute housing need while working within existing legislation.

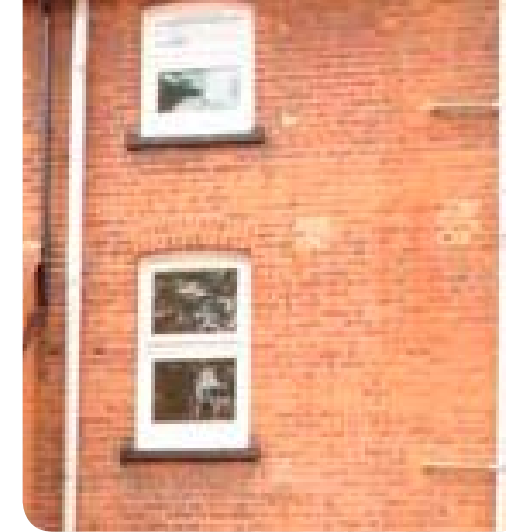
» **Personalisation:** enhanced housing options approach calls for personalised housing advice to be offered to those in housing need. By building up a picture of each customer's situation and suggesting appropriate solutions based on this evidence, the advice offered is realistic and therefore sustainable.

» **Empowerment:** a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment emerges when people feel they have an element of control over the decisions that affect them and their families. Good options services should as far as possible aim to guide, support and encourage while leaving the final decision making firmly in the hands of the person it will affect the most – the client.

» **Inclusiveness:** enhanced housing options services need to be appropriate for all those with housing need, including the most vulnerable and socially excluded.

» **Proactive engagement:** it takes a proactive approach to encourage people to contact the local authority at anything other than the point of crisis, despite the benefits of addressing low and medium levels of housing need before it becomes acute. Moreover, some groups of potential customers will be harder to reach than others, or will not be able to access mainstream services – these groups will need to have the service brought to them.

» **Holism:** the causes of housing need are complex and interrelated. We want to see a shift from a mentality that puts housing and employment, education, training and benefits in separate boxes, and instead encourage staff to think holistically in their management of housing crises – thinking long-term towards ways in which people can obtain and also sustain their homes.



» **Partnership working:** if services are to be holistic then they will need to be the result of extensive partnership working between organisations with different areas of expertise. Partnership working could be fostered formally through meetings, training events, and workshops, or informally through networking and forums.

» **Working with the grain of the Local Area Agreement (LAA):** the LAA will set out local priorities – these should shape the goals of the enhanced housing options service. The service should as far as possible be used to meet these targets alongside the four principle outcomes.



» **Capturing wider resources:** having made the links between housing need and a range of other agendas, including tackling worklessness, addressing social exclusion and improving community safety, resources will be marshalled from a wide range of sources to address shared problems and meet shared outcomes.

» **Cross-boundary working:** housing problems are often not limited to a finite geographical area – for example, a person may work in one borough, live in another, and spend their leisure time in a third. And some clients – for example, victims of domestic violence or people that need to leave behind previous criminal networks, need to move to different areas. In addressing housing and wider mobility needs, partnership working will need to extend across local authority boundaries to be fully effective.



## The Ashford Gateway

### A New Vision for Public Services

A young woman facing homelessness due to a relationship breakdown noticed the Ashford Gateway public services centre while out looking for a job in the Park Mall shopping area, where the Gateway is sited. She noticed that the Gateway had housing advisers and decided to go in. Within an hour she was provided with an options interview which gave her advice on how to access a private rented property - she then went on to use the free internet access at the Gateway to find employment.

The Ashford Borough Council housing department decided that they wanted to operate their housing advice service from the Gateway centre because of the potential benefits of joint working and increased accessibility.

A member of staff: "The Gateway's prime location and relaxed style foster a more helpful environment to encourage those interested in housing to consider their options. We see housing advice as a holistic function and the ability to be able to

"We see housing advice as a holistic function."

The Ashford Gateway is a partnership project led by Kent County Council which draws selected retail concepts into its vision for improved public access to a range of services. The clearly branded Gateway is a light, easy-to-access centre with a warm, welcoming colour scheme. Like the most innovative of retail spaces, the Gateway is designed to deliver a holistic customer experience, and its cross-agency approach means that those with complex needs are served faster, better and more efficiently.

link up with other agencies (such as social care and adult education) via the Gateway to help address and prevent homelessness is invaluable."



## London Borough of Camden

### Pathways to Success

Aarti was released from Holloway prison in 2006. She had spent much of her time in prison attempting rehabilitation from heroin addiction. Although not completely clean of heroin, she was showing a strong ambition to fight her addiction of over 25 years. Through a private letting scheme facilitated by Camden's Housing Options service, Aarti moved into a studio flat on her release.

options for a wide range of customers in housing need. This work is led within the Options Service by a dedicated development team who are charged with - among other things - managing a series of private rented schemes for particular client groups. The schemes hinge on the creation and maintenance of good relationships with accredited private sector landlords and are highly successful - last year Camden housed 380 households in the private

"He received life skills guidance to prepare him for independent living."

With the help of a Homeless Household Support Officer, the allocated Drugs Intervention Programme worker and floating support Aarti immediately began to make the new flat her own. After two weeks in the accommodation, Aarti stopped taking heroin and began picking up a methadone prescription regularly, which was gradually reduced. Aarti has now completed an Introduction to Computers course and is looking for further education with an ambition to gain employment.

Camden recognises that different client groups require different approaches and is committed to developing

sector through these schemes. Mark was placed in supported housing in Camden's Hostel Pathway when he was 17 and unable to continue to living at home. He received life skills guidance to prepare him for independent living. When he and his support worker decided he was ready, Mark was referred to the Pathways Move-On Team to move him into the private rented sector. At 19 he moved into a flat share with two other young people who met beforehand to prepare for living together. Six months later Mark had started a Business Management HNC and he said that his move into an independent tenancy provided him with the platform to achieve his goals.

## 8

## Housing Options Trailblazer Programmes

Communities and Local Government is keen to support the innovation and creativity of local authorities looking to offer high quality advice to local people in housing need<sup>3</sup>. Housing options is becoming the ethos of choice, and this is a direction of travel that we would strongly encourage all local authorities to take. A number of local authorities have begun developing enhanced housing options services. We want to learn from their experiences and gather good practice, as well as supporting local authorities who wish to develop housing options services – but have not already done so – in setting up efficient services that meet the needs of the local population.

Communities and Local Government will part-fund two programmes of ‘trailblazers’. From these, we intend to develop a tool kit of ideas and methods based on a comprehensive evaluation, to be distributed to all local authorities.

### Programme 1: The Enhanced Housing Options EXTRA Programme

» This programme is for local authorities wishing to enhance their existing housing options services. Local authorities will:

- » have a strong track record on homelessness prevention, and be on target to have Choice-Based Lettings in place by 2010
- » receive a grant of up to £350,000 (London authorities) or £320,000 (authorities in the rest of England) over three years (2008/09 – 2010/11) in order to further develop their existing service in line with the outcomes set out in the Enhanced Housing Options vision
- » become part of our ‘integrated employment and housing advice’ pilot, receiving a package of support to enable service users to access employment advice (for example, through signposting and access to job points), alongside housing advice
- » specifically work to develop housing options services for ex-offenders and other socially excluded adults
- » become a mentor to other local authorities, sharing skills and expertise. The programme grant allows for the costs associated with mentoring
- » become part of a ‘virtual team’ of local authorities at the cutting edge of the housing options approach, an opportunity to share ideas and overcome challenges

- » be closely involved in the development of a tool-kit of useful information and ideas for other local authorities hoping to expand their housing options services in the future

Expressions of interest should demonstrate a track record on housing options and explain how this could be expanded with additional funding, demonstrating the principles outlined in this document.

There is a limited amount on offer, so only five bids will be funded. Service enhancements outlined on the expressions of interest form should be directly linked to the prescribed outcomes and any other sources of funding should be clearly stated.

### Programme 2: The Enhanced Housing Options Programme

This trailblazer programme is for local authorities interested in developing Enhanced Housing Options services. As part of this programme, local authorities will:

- » receive a grant of up to £260,000 (London authorities) or £240,000 (authorities in the rest of England) over two years in order to develop enhanced housing options services
- » be assigned a mentor, a local authority with strong housing

options services, to guide you through the planning process and set-up stages, and to provide ongoing advice and support as you begin to develop your service

- » become part of a ‘virtual team’ of developmental local authorities, with whom you can share experiences and challenges during the course of the trailblazer programme and beyond

- » be closely involved in the development of a tool-kit of useful information and ideas for other local authorities hoping to expand their housing options services in the future

Expressions of interest should demonstrate an interest in housing options, and explain how funding would contribute to the development of enhanced housing options services.

There is a limited amount on offer, so only 10 bids will be funded. Service developments outlined on the expressions of interest form should be directly linked to the prescribed outcomes and any other sources of funding clearly stated.

### Notes

#### i) Who Can Apply?

Funding will be made available to local authorities. We are looking for expressions of interest from

<sup>3</sup> Under s166(1) of the Housing Act 1996 all authorities must make available, free of charge, advice and information about the right to make an application for an allocation of housing.







local authorities with housing responsibilities, and would also encourage applications from partnerships arrangements between local authorities and other key delivery partners. Please note, however, that all applications must nominate one lead local authority to whom funding will be allocated.

#### *ii) Bidding Process*

Interested parties are invited to submit expressions of interest for one of the two trailblazer programmes. Short-listed candidates will then be sent more detailed bidding guidance and invited to submit an in-depth bid that demonstrates a commitment to the Enhanced Housing Options approach and an awareness of local need.

#### *iii) Timetable*

Expressions of interest for both programmes should reach Communities and Local Government by **25 April 2008**. Short listed local authorities will be informed shortly afterwards and invited to submit an in-depth bid outlining their proposals in more detail. The Enhanced Housing Options EXTRA Programme will run in years 2008/09 – 2010/11, and the Enhanced Housing Options Programme from 2009/10 – 2010/11.

#### *iv) Funding*

Funding for 'Extra' trailblazers begins in 2008 in monthly instalments. Funding for all other trailblazers begins in 2009.

#### *v) How Expressions of Interest will be Assessed*

Expressions of interest will be assessed on the extent to which we feel proposals will deliver around the outcomes outlined in this document and meet local priorities as identified in Local Area Agreements.

We will be working closely with homelessness, CBL and overcrowding advisers when deciding on funding allocations, and will take into account the broader approach of the local authority when deciding which services to fund.

Applicants must demonstrate local need for the types of service enhancements suggested.

#### *vi) Monitoring and Evaluation*

The Enhanced Housing Options trailblazers are an important policy development, and it is important that Communities and Local Government assembles robust evidence on the process issues connected with setting up the trailblazers, and the costs of running the service. It is very important that we track the immediate and the longer term outcomes for the different client groups who approach the service to assess the added value of the new trailblazers. The research team will need to work with the trailblazers at a very early stage to determine the most effective way of contacting the different client groups.

We are planning to commission an independent evaluation, envisaging that the research team will work very closely with the trailblazer areas to put in place an efficient monitoring system that meets the information needs of both the trailblazer area and Communities and Local Government in terms of assessing progress on a regular basis. Where possible, the monitoring system should take into account any systems that are already in place.

The evaluation will also include an important 'process issue' element, capturing more qualitative data from the trailblazers on the implementation issues and your views on the transferable lessons. This element will be very important for helping to identify the good practice lessons which can inform the possible further roll out of the programme. Given the importance of the pilot evaluation, it is important that all those who express an interest in becoming a pilot area also agree to take part in the monitoring and evaluation stage.

#### *vii) Capturing Wider Resources*

Local authorities who have identified worklessness targets in their Local Area Agreement negotiations, or who have received an allocation from the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, may be particularly interested in further developing the employment element of the Enhanced Housing Options approach and may choose to support this with their area-based grant.

#### *viii) Department for Innovation Universities & Skills (DIUS) Adult Advancement and Careers services*

Over the next two years, DIUS will be trialling aspects of a new, universal adult advancement and careers service. These trials will involve local advice partners, drawing on their ideas and experience to test out ways of delivering joined-up services. The new advancement and careers service will adopt a 'no wrong door' approach, developed jointly with local authorities, colleges, the voluntary sector and housing, childcare, health and financial advice services. It will offer help and support on learning, jobs and careers and provide seamless referral to wider, expert advice when it is needed.

Both sets of trials and trailblazers are examples of closer working between different government departments. In order to ensure that lessons learned from this new way of working are disseminated as widely as possible, best practice from both sets of trials and trailblazers will feed into the Housing Options tool kit and into the design of Adult Advancement and Careers Services.





## West London Housing Partnership

Identifying Need and Integrating Advice for Specific Client Groups

Housing Needs staff at the West London HELP project (run by the West London Housing Partnership) have just begun referring people living in temporary accommodation to employment services.

The HELP project surveyed households in temporary accommodation in West London and identified several hundred who said they would like to see an employment and training adviser. In

response to this identified need, focus groups were held by HELP staff with households to identify the key issues and barriers they faced in finding employment. HELP project staff have worked to set up referral links with key agencies in each borough alongside a web-based tracking system to monitor outcomes. They have also prepared housing needs staff for the change in work practices expected as a result of the scheme.

“The HELP project has worked to set up referral links with key agencies.”

## Anchor ‘Staying Put’

A Multi-Agency Approach

Leverage finance from the Dorset Partnership for Older People Projects (POPPs) initiative has been instrumental in building a funding partnership across the statutory and voluntary sectors, consisting of the Royal British Legion, Help the Aged, Dorset Primary Care Trust and five district councils. Anchor ‘Staying Put’ operates a Housing Options project offering impartial advice, advocacy and support, enabling older people to make an informed choice about whether to move house and advising them of all available options. Caseworkers are based in each of the three Dorset Home Improvement Agencies working closely with POPPs and the County Council. Since April 2007 the project has advised more than 200 people across Dorset.

In addition, Mrs H experiences extremely poor mobility and short-term memory loss. The Housing Options caseworker undertook a benefits check and discussed possible alternatives with the couple and their solicitor (legal Next-of-Kin) and an application was subsequently submitted to the Extra-Care housing scheme in Weymouth. A care manager from Social Services assessed the couple’s needs and Mr and Mrs H duly moved into a two bedroom flat with care support. The caseworker gave practical support (packing, obtaining quotes for removal etc) to the couple throughout the move. Following the move however, Mrs H’s health continued to deteriorate and a meeting was held with all relevant parties to determine what additional support could be



Mr and Mrs H were referred to the Housing Options service by their GP, as he had concerns about their living arrangements and how they were coping. The couple were owner-occupiers of a warden-supported flat, but the assistance offered by this scheme was proving insufficient to meet their needs. Both partners are frail, advancing in years (90+) and, in

addition, Mrs H experiences extremely poor mobility and short-term memory loss. The Housing Options caseworker undertook a benefits check and discussed possible alternatives with the couple and their solicitor (legal Next-of-Kin) and an application was subsequently submitted to the Extra-Care housing scheme in Weymouth. A care manager from Social Services assessed the couple’s needs and Mr and Mrs H duly moved into a two bedroom flat with care support. The caseworker gave practical support (packing, obtaining quotes for removal etc) to the couple throughout the move. Following the move however, Mrs H’s health continued to deteriorate and a meeting was held with all relevant parties to determine what additional support could be

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