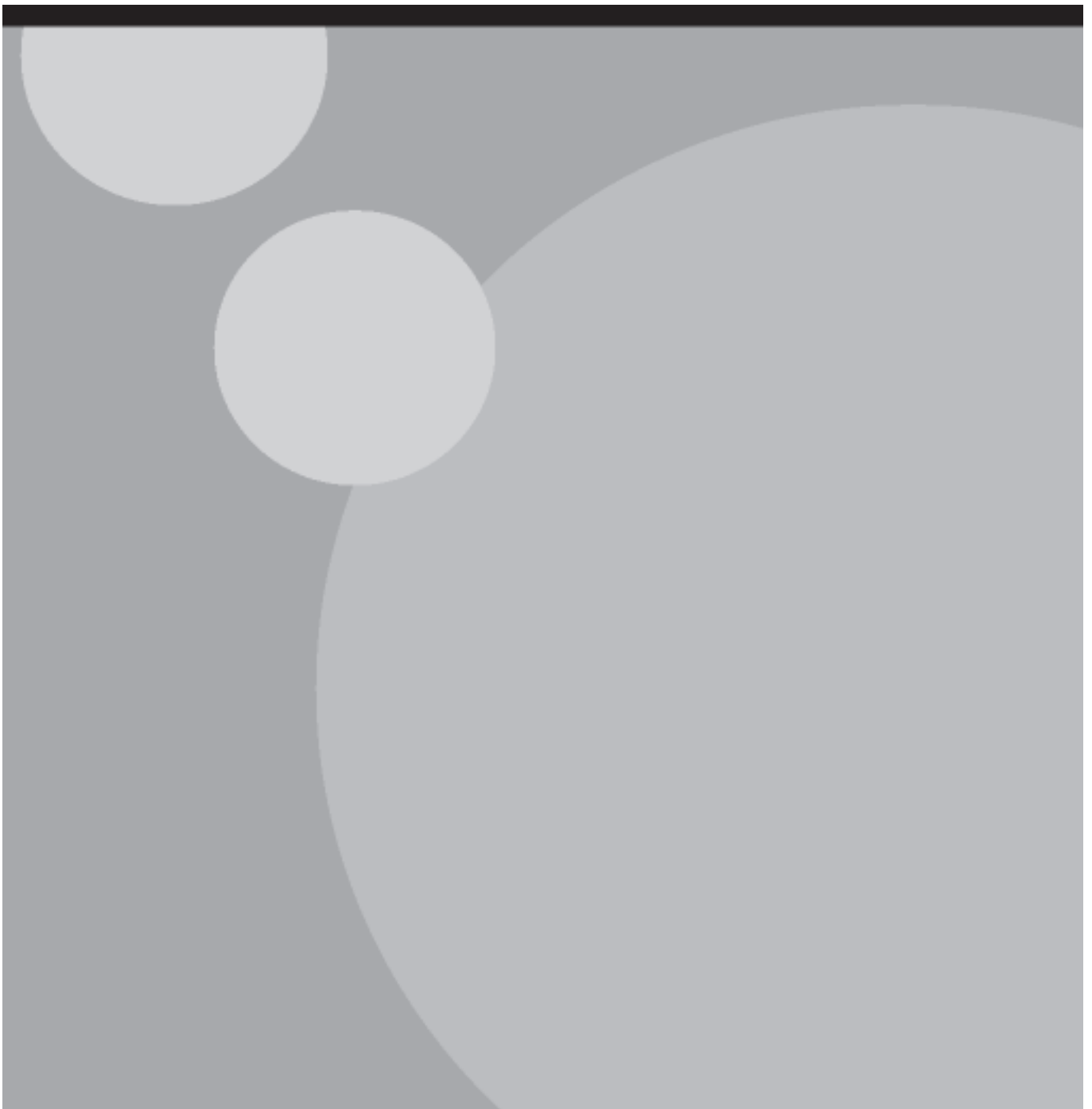




Working Hostels

Models of Provision



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Introduction

In *No One Left Out: communities ending rough sleeping* it was recognised that some hostels are more geared towards people with high support needs and have relatively high rents. As such, not all hostels – even those with the facilities for training and skills development programmes – are ideal environments for people who are nearer to the labour market and want to start working.

Many hostel residents are also unaware of in-work support and it is essential for hostel staff to promote in-work support to residents, and encourage them to gain work – even where this may be temporary in nature and can be seen as adding to the management time required from staff, as people's benefit entitlements may change.

No One Left Out sets out the intention to test new approaches and pathways including development of hostels geared towards supporting and stabilising people in employment.

A working hostel is anticipated to be a stepping-stone enabling residents to move on from rough sleeping into work or into alternative housing pathways. They would also offer an alternative and quicker route into independent accommodation ensuring that people in less specialised hostels who are nearer to working can benefit from an atmosphere where work is the expectation. It was envisaged that support would be of a different nature than that offered in mainstream hostel provision. Lower intensity but better targeted support would be available, supplemented by specialist help from Jobcentre Plus.

Communities and Local Government has discussed possible approaches for such hostels with stakeholders, including the Department for Work and Pensions, local authorities and voluntary and community organisation (VCO) providers.

The model discussed included the following key attributes:

- A stepping stone service – part of a specific pathway from rough sleeping and homelessness into work and stable housing
- Low support – for people capable of living independently with only housing management input
- Affordable rents – within Local Housing Allowance (LHA) to enable residents to gain experience in budgeting. Where possible, if rents were below LHA, some savings could be generated towards a deposit on future private rented sector (PRS) accommodation. Alternatively, move on from the hostels

would be linked into the local authorities' PRS access scheme for non-statutory homeless households

- Employment support and advice would be “wrapped around” individual – through on site sessions, work based visits, links with local mainstream services (Jobcentre Plus, employment centres, further education colleges, local Places of Change facilities).

Following these initial discussions, two models have been identified. The first is being developed by Thames Reach in conjunction with One Housing Group. The second has been developed by Brighton Housing Trust and Brighton & Hove City Council, who have worked in partnership to establish a working hostel model.

This paper provides an overview of these two approaches, including some initial outcomes and contact details for further information.

Thames Reach and One Housing Group

Working Hostel Model

Thames Reach is working with One Housing Group to identify short-life units that can be used to provide affordable accommodation for people who have secured paid employment. These units would otherwise stand empty, and incur security charges as they would be at risk of squatting and further damage/deterioration. Occupied properties, with intensive housing management funded through the rental income, are preferred by the local community to derelict empty properties which can have impacts upon perceived community safety.

It is anticipated that the accommodation will be of use to people from the A8 countries who have experienced homelessness and have slept rough, but who are relatively close to the labour market. A8 nationals who are exercising their Treaty Rights have entitlements to in work benefits such as Housing Benefit, but will have very limited recourse to public funds if they experience periods of worklessness. Accommodation which is let at rent levels that enable them to save whilst working will help minimise the risks of homelessness and avoid rough sleeping in the future, and will also enable them to build a nest egg upon their return home, should this be the eventual outcome.

The accommodation will be made available by the registered social landlord (RSL) owner for up to six months and let on a four week licence agreement.

The accommodation will be targeted at:

- A8 nationals
- People who are working legally and formally registered through the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS), where required
- People who are unemployed but committed to securing work within an agreed period of time
- People who are willing to save whilst benefiting from a low rent, and put these towards deposits to secure PRS accommodation, or to establish themselves should they decide to return home.

Thames Reach will let and manage the properties. They will also provide an intensive housing management service to:

- Help residents establish themselves in the accommodation, and plan towards moving on to properties in the PRS

- Develop life skills including paying and budgeting for utility, rent and other accommodation costs
- Signpost residents to other appropriate support services.

Thames Reach will also provide advice and support to residents to:

- Help people secure legal work
- Ensure people are registered with the WRS where appropriate
- Provide training and volunteering placements to help people re-activate skills in preparation for employment.

Outcomes will be monitored, and focus upon numbers finding or maintaining work during their licence period; numbers engaged on/completing English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) courses; numbers registered on the WRS; numbers establishing themselves as self employed and numbers moving on to PRS accommodation.

Brighton Housing Trust and Brighton & Hove City Council

Working Hostel Model

Context

Brighton & Hove City Council have a well developed single homelessness strategy, which includes specific actions on preventing and tackling rough sleeping, and supporting people into learning, training and work.

They have a clear accommodation pathway, which integrates approaches to housing and employment. This embeds work and learning (basic skills, life skills and work skills) into the hostel, intensive and medium to low floating support services it commissions for homeless people and rough sleepers, and has clear outcomes relating to learning and work for these services.

The Working Hostel is one of the initiatives that form part of this comprehensive and flexible pathway.

The Working Hostel

Accommodation and affordability

The working hostel was established in April 2009, and comprises three small shared houses (approximately six beds each) with a dedicated project worker, who provides housing management and employment support.

The three properties are owned by Brighton Housing Trust (BHT), an RSL, and had been run as traditional shared supported housing prior to being decommissioned by the Supporting People programme. There is no/only residual mortgage costs associated with the properties enabling a rent to be charged which is within LHA. The rent is £84 per week and there is a £10 per week eligible service charge. The rental income covers the property costs and the costs of the worker who offers intensive housing management.

Affordable rents

It is important to secure properties which do not require high rents to cover the basic costs of providing the accommodation. Private sector leasing may not be an appropriate way of procuring properties, as this approach usually incurs management overheads on top of the LHA rent levels paid to the landlord. Existing RSL/council owned properties, decommissioned shared houses, or properties on a short life basis in regeneration areas can meet these requirements.

Access - pathway approach

The working hostel fits into the pathway by offering a move on from traditional hostels and an alternative to the larger hostels and supported housing for people with higher needs (Band 2) operating within Brighton and Hove. It is aimed at:

- Rough sleepers who are managing to work (often in night shifts within the food and hospitality sector) who do not want to use larger hostels
- Hostel residents who want to work and find the larger hostels a difficult environment, due to the higher needs and sometime chaotic behaviour of others living there
- People at risk of rough sleeping – sofa surfers, people using squats – who do not want or need to enter the more traditional higher support accommodation pathway.

Referrals are received from:

- Housing Options
- BHT's Housing Advice service
- Street Outreach Team
- Probation
- VCO organisations – including Band 2 hostel and supported housing providers.

The working hostel therefore enables people to leave Band 2 accommodation, or provides an alternative pathway for people who do not need or wish to go through Band 2 accommodation.

Access arrangements

It is important for access routes into the service to be clear and enable a flexible approach to meeting people's needs. In this way, a working hostel can play a key role in both preventing people sleeping rough, and enabling those who have slept rough to move on without always going through the established accommodation and support pathway. This can provide value for money, and is the basis for an invest to save business case – as services are better targeted and people are not required to move through costly high support services which they may not need.

Ethos and culture

The Working Hostel is not a suitable housing option for everyone. It is specifically aimed at people with:

- Learning and work guidance needs
- Good independent life skills
- A commitment to securing and sustaining training and/or employment
- A willingness to move on into the PRS.

The project worker agrees an individual action plan with each resident to agree the steps that will be taken to find work. They have access to a “work enabling budget” – which is externally funded. This can cover the costs of new clothes for interviews, and additional bus fares so people can travel to a range of interviews.

The project worker can also provide intensive housing management interventions – advice with in-work benefit claims, budgeting and rent paying, and some issues that arise from sharing accommodation. The project worker will also encourage residents to save in preparation for when they move on and need deposits and funds to set up home.

However, the project worker cannot – and will not – offer more general support. The working hostels are “*not about support needs but focus on finding work*”. All courses are expected to be vocational and lead to improved prospects for employment – rather than offering less focused “meaningful occupation”.

It is expected therefore that the project will look like somewhere from which people will be working. Evidence of alcohol or drug use (e.g. cans, drugs paraphernalia) is strongly challenged and will lead to people being evicted (to more appropriate accommodation options within the pathway).

Peer support is encouraged – with weekly house meetings sharing information on courses and experiences of different jobs, and residents accompanying each other to appointments and courses.

Clear ethos

It is important to be clear about who the working hostel is for, to avoid the risk of it becoming simply an additional supported housing option. This may require asking people for whom the model is not appropriate to leave – although alternative accommodation within the local pathway should be secured, and people should not be evicted onto the streets.

Partnership approach

Almost one third of the residents of the Working Hostels are on Employment Support Allowance (ESA) or Incapacity Benefit; just over half are on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and one fifth are in work. This means that they are at very different stages in relation to being close to work, but all share a commitment to finding employment in the next few months. As such, a wide range of employment and training organisations are linked with to ensure people receive the correct and tailored support and guidance they need.

BHT has a client resource centre that can be used by residents in the working hostels to access computer, email, printing and postage services, as well as help with CV and job applications. However, key links are with more mainstream services: Jobcentre Plus; local further education colleges; the Pathways to Work and flexible New Deal providers in Brighton; and Advice Information and Guidance providers (who will be located in or provide in-reach sessions to the new Community Hub). Business Action on Homelessness is commissioned by the local authority and has also been a key partner in supporting people to find work and increase their employability.

Working partnerships

Any project worker linked to a Working Hostel will need a good understanding of the different mainstream services that can assist people on different benefits to gain skills and find work. It will be important that they are focused on developing links with a wide range of local providers – hence the need for a specialist project that is work orientated, rather than providing more generic supported housing.

Outcomes and learning

The Working Hostel has only been established for a few months, and so outcomes and learning are still very much a work in progress. However, the outcomes to date are encouraging and indicate that the Working Hostel can provide a much needed stepping stone for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping, into work.

Accommodation related outcomes: To date, 25 individuals have moved into the Working Hostels with three moving on in the first four months to general needs accommodation in the private rented sector. Three people have been evicted as the project was not suitable and their behaviour was disruptive, or they refused to engage with the work related support. One further person has left of their own accord.

Work related outcomes: To date, one person has secured full-time work and three have secured part-time work. Six have applied to attend college from September 2009 and 13 have participated in Business Action on Homelessness (BAOH) workshops, with one person completing a BAOH work placement. In addition, people are engaged with voluntary work and attending a range of vocational skills based courses.

Outcomes

In the first four months the need to ensure the hostel was working with the correct client group has resulted in three people being asked to leave. The focus on work and training related outcomes is important to maintain the culture of the project – but also to raise aspirations for residents, including those with physical and mental health related difficulties.

Further information

On the Thames Reach Working Hostel Model

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On the Brighton Housing Trust Working Hostel (operation and funding)

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On developing a strategic approach that integrates accommodation and learning and work services

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On preventing and tackling rough sleeping

CLG's specialist advisers (rough sleeping)

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