



ISLINGTON

Housing, Performance and Property

60 Highbury New Park
London N5 2DJ

T 020 7527 4438

F 020 7527 4188

31 October 2005

Dear Islington Housing Network Member,

Re: Feedback Islington's Housing Network

The Islington Housing Network is a forum to discuss strategic issues and is vital for us in developing our housing policy and strategy. Each conference is based around the council's strategic priorities and the feedback is used to develop our housing strategy.

The conference theme for our 12 July 2005 Housing Network was '**Reducing homelessness, building communities - Developing Islington's strategy for tackling homelessness**'. We invited a wide range of stakeholders to attend the conference and exchange ideas.

The invited speakers were: Mark Meehan from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister who gave a presentation on the Government's strategy for preventing homelessness. Peter McDonagh from Colchester Borough Council talked about good practice in preventing homelessness from a Beacon Council's perspective and Sean McLaughlin from Islington council spoke about tackling homelessness in Islington.

The speakers were followed by a number of workshops. The workshop participants discussed what should be the priorities for the Prevention of Homelessness strategy.

The attached pack provides an overview of the day as well as a summary of the speeches and workshop discussions. Having looked at the material contained in the pack we would encourage you to let us know what you think of the feedback given. We welcome your views on which issues you would like us to cover in future housing network conferences. It is important that we keep the momentum of the conference going so please take some time to fill in the accompanying form and return it to us.

If you are not the correct person for us to contact about the Islington Housing Network please let us know who the contact in your organisation should be.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Jennings
Deputy Chief Executive

Feedback Pack: Islington Housing Network

**Reducing homelessness, building
communities - Developing Islington's
strategy for tackling homelessness**

Tuesday 12 July 2005



ISLINGTON

Contents

Introductory Presentation - Setting the context, challenges and Opportunities.	3
Councillor Jyoti Vaja - Executive Member for Housing and Community Safety	
Summary of Speeches	4
The Governments strategy for preventing homelessness	5
Mark Meehan -The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	
Good practice in preventing homelessness from a Beacon Council's perspective	6
Peter McDonagh – Colchester Borough Council	
Tackling homelessness in Islington, the issues and actions needed to review our strategy	7
Sean McLaughlin – Islington Council	
Feedback from Workshops	8
Workshop 1 – Providing more settles homes. Making better use of the Private sector & existing social housing.	9
Workshop 2 – Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness	10
Workshop 3 – Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation & enabling Temporary accommodation to become a settled home	11
Workshop 4 – Support for people when they are vulnerable and risk of homelessness.	12
Final Plenary	13
Using the information gathered at the Islington Housing Network	14
Feedback Questionnaire	15

Introductory Presentation - Setting the context, challenges and opportunities

Councillor Jyoti Vaja, Executive Member for Housing and Community Safety

Councillor Vaja started by introducing the theme of the conference which was 'Reducing homelessness, building communities - Developing Islington's strategy for tackling homelessness', and how this conference was the start of the process to review Islington's current prevention of homelessness strategy and develop Islington's strategy for tackling homelessness until 2009. She then invited the delegates as stakeholders to take an active role in the development of the strategy through the workshops.

The work to implement Islington's first prevention of homelessness strategy is ongoing and there have been a number of achievements. The achievements Councillor Vaja listed included:

- Producing a Housing Options toolkit which provides information to help people find accommodation which suits their needs.
- Achieving and then maintaining zero families with children in Bed and Breakfast
- Implementing a 'Home Shelter' scheme for clients who are victims of domestic violence.
- Rolling out the Choice Based Lettings scheme across the borough.

Councillor Vaja then talked about Islington's aim to build on the achievements of the current homelessness strategy and produce a strategy which takes account of current Government thinking, rooted in good practice, is innovative, and adopts a range of interventions. The aim of the strategy is to help improve the quality of life for homeless people in Islington.

The experience of homelessness should not prevent people leading a secure and dignified life or interrupt their employment, education and access to health care. Touching on the 'One Islington' vision, Councillor Vaja said that Islington should be a greener place to live and work, a place where people of all backgrounds are able to achieve their full potential, and a borough of safe, thriving and active communities where people are involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

Councillor Vaja finished by outlining the focus of the conference and welcoming contributions, views and comments from delegates in a lively debate.

Summary of the Speeches

The Government strategy for preventing homelessness

Mark Meehan - Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

**Good practice in preventing homelessness from a
Beacon Council's perspective**

Peter McDonagh – Colchester Borough Council

**Tackling homelessness in Islington, the issues and
actions needed to review our strategy**

Sean McLaughlin – Islington Council

The Government strategy for preventing homelessness

Mark Meehan – Special Advisor to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Mark started his speech by talking about his background in housing. He then introduced the Government's five year strategy on tackling and reducing homelessness, 'Settled homes; Changing lives' providing an outline of the key messages.

Then Mark presented statistics on the changes in types of temporary accommodation used in London and length of time a household stayed in that accommodation. The statistics showed that from the end of December 2001 to the end of March 2005 the number of Households staying in Bed and Breakfast accommodation decreased by around 50%, whilst those staying in Private accommodation had increased by approximately 50%.

For the same period the percentage of households in temporary accommodation for less than 6 months fell from 44% to about 31%. In comparison the figure for households in temporary accommodation for more than two years increased from around 12% at the end of December 2001 to approximately 26% at the end of March 2005.

Mark went on to talk about the main causes of homelessness in 2004-05. The most common causes of homelessness included:

- Exclusion by relatives/friends, by far the biggest reason for homelessness;
- relationship breakdown (violent);
- relationship breakdown (other); and
- loss of home due to mortgage/rent arrears.

Mark then looked at trends in London for homelessness cases. The figures showed that in the quarter January to March 2004 there were just under 18,000 decision on homelessness cases with just under 8,000 acceptances. Figures for the quarter January to March 2005 showed that both the number of decisions and acceptances had fallen since the beginning of 2004 to approximately 14,000 decisions and about 6,000 acceptances.

From looking at figures and trends on homelessness Mark then focussed on actions which would help prevent homelessness. Actions that Local Authorities could take included:

- Mediation for those excluded by friends/ families,
- Developing sanctuary schemes to help victims of violence stay in their homes,
- Rent deposit schemes for private sector tenants
- Debt counselling and advice on life skills and budgeting.

Mark finished his presentation by stating the Government's target to halve the number of homeless people in temporary accommodation by 2010.

Good practice in preventing homelessness from a Beacon Council's perspective

Peter McDonagh – Colchester Borough Council

Peter began by looking at Colchester's position before achieving Beacon status. He stated that Colchester had an established Housing Aid Centre, established Private Sector Lettings Scheme and a good reputation locally with strong partnership working. But there were high levels of homeless applications, acceptances and use of bed and breakfast.

Colchester changed their position through senior management pressure and support, political will, funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and internal reorganisation. Harrow Council's 'Good Practice Guide' on homelessness was also looked at and Peter emphasised the importance of looking at good practice from other local authorities.

Peter then went in to the detail of the actions taken by Colchester to bring about change including:

- concentrating on new staff and projects;
- appointing a bed and breakfast "move-on" officer,
- appointing a Housing Benefits "fast-track" officer and a visiting officer; and
- secondments for Homelessness Review.

Other practical issues included an establishment of the

- Transfer of B & B budget out of homelessness and creation of "homelessness Initiatives" budget,
- Development of a Private Sector Lettings Team and the introduction of a "Homefinder Scheme", and
- Housing Options approach through existing housing advisors.

This resulted in reducing homeless applications by 18%, a fall in acceptances by 42% and the number of households in temporary accommodation went down 25% for 2004/05 compared to the previous year.

Peter then talked about the lessons learnt as a result of the change process. He stated that staff were empowered with self-help strategies, more motivated due to having a shared vision and feel encouraged to challenge existing practices.

Considering Best Practice from Colchester, Peter then outlined what should go into a local homelessness strategy to gear actions to outcomes needed to prevent homelessness. He suggested that actions should be evidence based, SMART and needed to be reviewed and updated regularly with clear monitoring and reporting mechanisms in place. The strategy should also include statistical information to map out trends and quantify actions.

Peter concluded his speech by outlining the cross-cutting themes which should be considered in reviewing a homelessness strategy such as availability and access to support services, Information sharing and Joint working.

Tackling homelessness in Islington, the issues and actions needed to review our strategy

Sean McLaughlin – Islington Council

Sean commenced his presentation by focussing on the Prevention of Homelessness strategy produced in 2003. He highlighted the aim of the strategy was to prevent homelessness from arising, harming the community and having a long-term negative impact. He then referred to the Government's targets of reducing homelessness and halving temporary accommodation by 2010.

The current prevention of homeless strategy went through the council's scrutiny process in July 2005 and a new strategy will be produced by March 2006. There have been a number of notable successes such as:

- No families in bed and breakfast.
- Rough Sleeping is down to fewer than 5 people; and
- Quick processing of applications

Sean stated that a number of factors had contributed to what had been achieved in tackling homelessness. These were

- Effective communication such as the successful promotion of the anti-begging campaign "give where it counts" in partnership with St Mungo's, and the poster campaign informing people about the help and advice available to prevent homelessness.
- Having able and capable staff. For example the Single Homeless team were commended in the 2005 MJ Achievement Awards.
- Developing schemes to support the Housing Options agenda; and
- Taking a strategic approach and developing new supply of affordable housing.

Other factors contributing to the success were Choice based lettings, having an Allocation policy, Public service agreement regarding tenant mobility and the Low unit cost. All of these factors contribute to providing more housing options to people in Islington.

Sean then talked about some of the work that was being undertaken at present. This involved transferring the homeless advice line in to Contact Islington, the council's contact centre. There were specialist homelessness officers to deal with 16/17 year old homeless applicants.

Sean concluded his presentation by stating that although there had been a number of notable achievements there were areas of work which needed to be improved. These were:

- Reduction in the number of homeless applications per 000 population
- Cultural change both internally and externally with regards to advice/ intervention
- Making private sector options long term solutions; and
- Closer working with housing associations.

Workshops

Providing more settled homes. Making better use of the private sector and existing social housing

In this workshop delegates were asked to exchange ideas on what actions can be taken to provide more settled homes and make better use of the private sector and existing social housing

Key issues raised in discussion

- Incentives to move out of under occupied properties.
- The need to encourage landlords to consider particular groups of people e.g. disabled people.
- Landlord's perception of "high risk" groups should be reversed
- Use social landlords as an intermediary with long leasing from private owners
- The need for culture change, protection for tenants.
- Ensure private sector accommodation is of good quality

Actions reported back to plenary session

- Purchasing property for use as temporary housing for longer periods than 12 month assured tenancies
- The need to encourage those with homes (not only homeless people) to analyse their housing needs
- Universal Housing Benefit form in all languages
- Better Administration of Housing Benefit to stop eviction for rent Arrears
- Housing Associations should have more flexibility in use of stock e.g. key workers
- Better support network for vulnerable clients
- Stop right to buy in favour of tenant incentive scheme.

Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness

The aim of the workshop was to discuss the actions that can be taken in tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness

Key issues raised in discussion

- The encouragement of sub regional joint working
- Long term support packages (i.e. longer than 2 years) “one size doesn’t fit all” and family support
- Improve communication between agencies.
- More involvement for agencies commissioning services.
- Dialogue with Department of work and Pensions to make applications simpler- for various benefits
- Better Prevention - services have been too reactive in the past

Actions reported back to plenary session

- Welfare rights support in all area offices to give advice on take up of different benefits
- Tackling Debts – Providing advice and support on rent arrears/mortgage
- Develop better working relationship with social services and other bodies.
- Better information sharing e.g. Colchester’s information sharing protocol. The council should lead on co-ordinating joined up working
- Developing a holistic approach to dealing with homelessness by looking at individual circumstances
- Developing better hostel provision for vulnerable people.
- Provide advice and support to vulnerable people and to general needs applicants
- Learning from best practice e.g. Beacon councils and using ODPM Guidance

Reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation

The aim of the workshop was to get delegates to think about what could be done to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation.

Key issues raised in discussion

- Affordability is a major issue in being able to use the private sector. Encourage government to look at putting ceilings on rents.
- The council could invest in long term schemes to increase the time households spent in private housing.
- Explore possibility of benefits for particular events e.g. partner in prison. What about grant to help with mortgage?
- Provide a range of options to housing applicants and make policies less rigid

Actions reported back to plenary session

- Increase supply of housing by regular audits to find illegal tenants and promote under occupation.
- Provide information in an accessible way to prevent people having to apply as homeless.
- Robust homeless investigations with regular reviews of accepted homeless households to discuss options.
- Engage with other departments/services to identify potential homelessness at an earlier stage
- Housing Department should intervene as soon as it becomes aware of problems which could lead to homelessness.
- The council should be proactive in dealing with the causes of homelessness before they reach crisis point.
- More education of housing staff around initiatives that exist within the council
- Lobby the Government for legislation to provide better security of tenure in private tenancies.

Support for people when they are vulnerable and at risk of homelessness

The aim of the workshop was for delegates to exchange ideas on how to support people when they are vulnerable and at risk of homelessness

Key issues raised in discussion

- There is a need to identify why so many people from BME communities become homeless.
- Expectations of young people need to be managed and contained. Young people need to be aware that having accommodation of their own is not the only option e.g. admit placements and support lodgings
- Education department should keep transitional places open so children are able to attend local schools instead of commuting across London
- Many services provided to vulnerable people are compartmentalised by age groups.
- More support packages needed to help tenants being threatened with eviction.
- Look for areas of commonality amongst groups to see whether it benefits them to stay in specialised hostels e.g. don't always assume its best for an ex-offenders to live with other ex-offenders.

Actions reported back to plenary session

- Support people with multiple, complex needs by having clear sign postings mechanisms (for both clients and workers)
- Effective multi-agency working to support early intervention initiatives e.g. for pre 16 year olds tackle underlying issues that lead to antisocial behaviour
- The importance of cross-agency ownership and overcoming issues of confidentiality. Using technology to support initiatives such as single assessments and a joint team approach.
- Revising housing policy to ensure adequate support for vulnerable groups
- A reliable, up-to-date directory of support services in the Borough

Final Plenary

Andy Jennings presented the key actions from each of the workshops in a final plenary session. He outlined that the actions generated from the workshops will be looked at to see how they can be used to progress the work currently taking place with regards to housing and developing Islington's Prevention of Homelessness Strategy. He then closed the conference by thanking all the delegates for their participation.

Using the information gathered at the Islington Housing Network

The information gathered from the Islington Housing Network will be used in the following ways:

- The feedback pack is produced to give an overview to delegates of what was discussed at the conference.
- The feedback will assist the review of homelessness in Islington
- The feedback will inform the development of the new Prevention of Homelessness Strategy

Feedback Questionnaire

The Housing Network is a consultative forum to allow discussion on strategic housing issues. It comprises of members and all the major housing stakeholders. We aim to hold three conferences a year to discuss current housing issues and strategic development. We are continuously striving to improve the Network and welcome ideas on how it can be developed. Can you please complete the form below and return to Shahin Bakth by fax on **020 7527 4188** or e-mail **shahin.bakth@islington.gov.uk**

Name.....
Organisation.....
Address.....
Phone No.....E-mail.....

In order for us to keep our delegates list up to date please let us know if you are still the relevant contact for your organisation?

Yes No

If No, please give below the name of a relevant person in your organisation who we can contact about the Network.

Name.....
Phone No..... Email.....

As a member of the Network how would you like to be kept informed?

Conference Newsletter email

Other please specify.....

What issues would you like to see covered in future Islington Housing Network conferences?
.....
.....
.....

How would you rate the Network feedback given?

Excellent Satisfactory Less than Satisfactory

If less than satisfactory what could we do to improve future feedback?
.....
.....

Any other comments
.....
.....