

NHAS/HMPPS JOINT EVENT: A LEARNING WORKSHOP FOR OFFENDER MANAGEMENT PRACTITIONERS

EVENT REPORT
February 2020

Introduction

The National Homelessness Advice Service, in partnership with Her Majesty's Prisons and Probation Service, delivered a second learning workshop for offender management practitioners at the Ministry of Justice in London on the 26 February 2020.

What our delegates are saying:

“ It was great to refresh on some of the laws and expectations around housing support from agencies and councils, it was good to hear from local authorities and from other people who experience issues the same as we do when trying to support potentially vulnerable adults. It reignited my passion and interest in housing and I am in awe of the knowledge of the NHAS staff. ”

The Importance of Accommodation

Jennet Peters, Senior Contract Manager at HMPPS (communityRASS@justice.gov.uk) highlighted the areas of challenge including; end of licence and certain cohorts, e.g. there is an increase in older offenders, social care needs and difficult to place ex-offenders.

In 2018/19 40% of prisoners were released into unsettled accommodation and 4.2% were released to rough sleeping. Jennet advised that access to settled accommodation is a basic human right and went on to say that it is important that staff are in a position of knowledge in order to support and assist prisoners and ex-offenders, that staff need to be better equipped to utilise HRA, to become familiar with PHPs and to work in partnership to make DTR a useful tool.

MoJ Accommodation Policy

Graham Mackenzie, Head of Policy, Offender Accommodation and Family Engagement at the Ministry of Justice (graham.mackenzie@justice.gov.uk) was able to go into more detail for this event, as in November, he was restricted by Purdah.

Graham's highlights included:

- * We have a majority Conservative government with the same ministers back. This is very beneficial with a consistent message. MoJ Ministers and the PM are committed to reducing reoffending and homelessness
- * Ministers have held Round Table events with the third sector to identify best practice, share outcome rates and look at Universal Credit
- * More than half of rough sleepers have been in prison in the last 12 months
- * Approved Premises: Bail Accommodation and Support Services (BASS) are developing a strategic framework

- * Latest figures from Duty to Refer: Prison and Probation are submitting 25% of referrals, the highest number of referrals from a public authority
- * Women are more likely to be at high risk, HMPPS Wales looking at how best to support women
- * Other areas of policy to be discussed with Ministers including; the discharge grant of £46 and how best to support an individual before their release while they are in custody (tenancy training, bank accounts, Universal Credit and securing ID)

“ I’ll be sharing with colleagues MoJ policy on how they will tackle homelessness in the different regions of the UK
 - Delegate comment ”



MHCLG Update

Marie Gerald, Homelessness Advice and Support Team, Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, (HAST@communities.gov.uk) talked about:

- * Additional funding through the **Homelessness Reduction Grant - £263 million announced for 2020/21** - expected to provide 6,500 bed spaces and 2,500 new staff
- * MHCLG set up a **HRA working group, commissioned an independent review and had a call for evidence**, considering the delivery of the HRA and costs for local authorities. These activities are contributing towards a review of the Homelessness Reduction Act to be completed this year
- * HRA independent research asked LAs to rate delivery by public bodies of DtR – DWP and **Prisons/Probation** were considered to have the most effective referrals
- * Of those applications where a prevention/relief duty was accepted – offending history was one of the top four identified support needs
- * March 2018 Government launched the **Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI)**, providing funding to areas with highest numbers sleeping rough - £76 million funding to LAs 2018-2020
- * Impact- 2018 Rough Sleeping Count – 2% reduction in people sleeping rough, 19% in the RSI funded areas
- * **Under 25 year olds leaving custody are at a higher risk of homelessness**
- * HMPPS are working with Housing, Probation, Prison Services, Children’s Services and CRCs to identify and better support care leavers in custody
- * MHCLG funded St Basils Positive Pathway document that looks at Youth Justice Pathways

Offender Homelessness – Good Practice

James Jolly, Prison and Probation Adviser, Rough Sleeping Initiative, MHCLG (james.jolly@communities.gov.uk) highlighted the following areas in his presentation:

Housing First - Female Service Users

Supporting those who are homeless with complex needs, the Project began in 2015 in Tameside, Greater Manchester with the Community Resource Center (CRC). To date they have worked with 77 women.

Positive outcomes



How have they achieved this?

With a co-located Housing Needs Officer within prison and/or probation services. Examples include Haringey, HMP Bristol, HMP Bullingdon. The post involves the following aspects:

- Supporting service users, by carrying out assessments from where they are located
- Supporting probation/prison staff by being available to answer housing questions, upskilling those staff
- Supporting Duty to Refer referrals
- Supporting the Local Authority, by acting as a link into probation services

Learning Workshop: Duty to Refer

Delivered by Duncan Bannister, NHAS Trainer (duncan_bannister@shelter.org.uk).

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 & Duty to Refer: How to Make it Work

Seminar Aims:

- What is required under the duty to refer?
- What are the key points that need to be addressed to make it work effectively?
- Sharing of ideas/suggestions/examples of good practice

Key Points:

- The Duty to Refer is triggered when a public authority **considers** that a service user may be homeless or threatened with homelessness
- Before making a referral, **consent** must be sought
- Information is required regarding the identity of the housing authority the client wishes to be referred to (in England only)
- The referral itself **does not** constitute a homelessness application

Delegate Round Table Discussions: Duty to Refer

There were a lot of common experiences throughout the room, such as:

- * The case study used was a real Shelter Through The Gate referral. The response from the local authority to 'just turn up on the day' of release was reported as being a common response that the delegates were facing from LAs when they made referrals
- * The LA approach to DTR was variable depending on which local authority was involved, but feedback did not tend to be positive
- * A common thread was the lack of available accommodation suitable for ex-offenders and the feeling that because of the overall lack of accommodation, ex-offenders often end up with the 'real dregs' of accommodation that no one else will consider and that then leads to re-offending
- * Whilst there was a willingness on the delegates' part to work together with LAs and other agencies, the general feeling was that no one had much time to actually do it in practice

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I gained a better understanding of the Duty to Refer and homelessness issues in general

- Delegate comment

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Learning Workshop: Personalised Housing Plans

Delivered by Duncan Bannister, NHAS Trainer.



What makes a good Personalised Housing Plan?

Objectives for the session:

- To stimulate discussion as to the issues public authorities and clients may face in meeting the objectives of tailored personal housing plans, taking into account existing responsibilities of prison and probation services
- To consider the impact that local authority decision making may have on both the client and the public authority
- To share best practice approaches regarding involvement in supporting PHP content and meeting objectives from a service-based, and client, perspective

Duncan went on to advise that local authorities use guidance which sets out 'best practice' strategies for both Housing and Social Services teams. In relation to people with an offending history:

Guidance suggests that housing authorities work with the agencies responsible for probation as well as prisons and voluntary sector organisations to ensure clients can access suitable accommodation. The work suggested should be recorded in the personalised housing plan.



Delegate Round Table Discussions: Personalised Housing Plans

As with the DTR workshop there were common themes throughout the room. Although in contrast to an earlier event in November, some of the delegates had seen sight of PHPs and knew what they were, but again a good percentage had not.

- * Everyone felt that if they were given sight of the PHPs then they could assist the applicant with meeting their expected actions
- * One issue that came up a lot was around Local Connection and a perception that LAs were using this as a way of 'gatekeeping' or 'passing off' their responsibilities to other areas
- * There was a common feeling that because of the offenders' history, LAs are using this as an excuse for not providing any accommodation, regardless of whether or not they owe the applicant a housing duty. One delegate gave an example of being given a list of available accommodation and being told to check if it was suitable themselves within a tight window when trying to assist a Schedule 1 offender

- * Some delegates from the probation service thought that if they were involved with LAs in creating the PHP, they could help to manage the risk associated with any history of offending
- * The one area that was felt to be missing from the any of the PHPs was around how to sustain accommodation in the medium to long-term, and not just about how to find accommodation in the first instance

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Having had little knowledge of Housing law and PHP I now feel empowered with knowledge and support to challenge Local Authority housing decisions to support offenders within the community”

- Delegate comment

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Our Free NHAS services

Andy Nutley gave a National Homelessness Advice Service (NHAS) briefing, which covered the free services NHAS offer including; training, factsheets, guides and the Consultancy Line.

You can access our telephone consultancy service by calling 0300 330 0517 or via webchat on the [NHAS website](#) (just click the ‘chat with us button’). The service is available 9am – 6pm Monday to Friday

Our trainers are available to deliver training courses across England, find out more [here](#). Our website also holds a wealth of free information and resources.



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I will be sharing with colleagues how useful NHAS services can be for probation staff

- Delegate comment

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Next Steps

NHAS plans to run more events in 2020 which will be listed on the NHAS website. If you would like to access free training courses on topics such as Prisoners Housing Rights, Vulnerability, Public Authorities Duty to Refer, and more then head to our [training pages](#).

What NHAS & Shelter Services for Professionals Currently Offer

NHAS Free Services



Consultancy Line, Telephone & Webchat

- 0300 330 0517
- nhas.org.uk



Training

Including training specific to offenders:

- Face to-face course: Prisoners Housing Rights
- Online bitesize course: Housing Rights for Ex-Offenders



Expert Resources

- Website
- Factsheets
- Monthly ebulletin email
- Housing Matters email

Email nhas@shelter.org.uk to subscribe to the mailing list

Shelter Services



Shelter Specialist Debt Advice Service

- [Web enquiries](#) can be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Telephone service is open 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday
- 03300 580 404



Shelter Training

- May entail a cost
- Includes paid for course: [Prisoners' Housing Rights](#)

What NHAS Could Offer



Small regional events



Dedicated Consultancy Line for Prison & Probation staff



Bespoke training



Bespoke factsheets & guides

Get in touch with us if you would like to discuss any of the above suggestions by emailing nhas@shelter.org.uk