

# Places of Change

Tackling homelessness through the  
Hostels Capital Improvement Programme



The £90 million Hostels Capital Improvement Programme (HCIP) was launched in January 2005 with a specific aim of enabling hostels to become places of change. This leaflet provides examples of how the money is being spent and the lessons we are learning.



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*“ Since moving into the new centre we had more people make planned positive moves into their own accommodation than in two years at our previous site.”*

## 1. Introduction

In 1998 the Prime Minister set a target to reduce the number of people sleeping rough by at least two-thirds by 2002. The target was met a year early and has been sustained every year since. Many of the people who have been helped off the streets have found a bed in a hostel as the first step in the transition back to independence and a settled home.

However we found that too many people are staying in the hostel system for too long. Poor physical conditions and services that don't motivate people to address their needs can reinforce rather than break the cycle of homelessness. Also many more people have been leaving hostels for negative reasons – like eviction or abandonment – than for positive ones – like finding employment and a settled home. We want to change this.

We want hostels and other facilities for homeless people to provide the best opportunities for their clients, opportunities that will help people to move forward into work and a settled home. Through the £90 million Hostels Capital Improvement Programme we want to demonstrate that hostels and day centres can be centres of excellence and choice which positively change lives, they can be *places of change*.

By March 2008 across England:

- 150 projects
- £90 million invested
- Tens of thousands of lives transformed



## 2. What the programme is delivering

The key outcome of the programme will be to increase the number of people who move on positively from a hostel or homeless service, for example to a job or training and a settled home.

We will do this by encouraging hostels to;

- engage their residents in meaningful activity and with the community;
- involve their residents in the development of services;
- develop well-trained, motivated and supported staff; and
- provide a quality physical environment.



The programme is supporting real innovation not only in

hostels, but also in day centres and other projects that provide training and real work experience for people who are homeless or living in a hostel.

New ideas in design and the use of buildings are being explored to help deliver better services. The programme is not just about new buildings: changes in services and developing the staff that deliver them are even more important.

Projects include activities not usually associated with the provision of services for homeless people such as: sports facilities and work related training opportunities; a café and a car mechanic garage staffed by hostel residents; a “self-build” scheme where a hostel extension is being built by residents – most of whom have now moved into private rented accommodation and have real jobs in the construction industry. Together with The Housing Corporation we are supporting around 150 projects around England and we are already seeing some great results.

**Services which engage** provided by **motivated staff** in **welcoming buildings** will end the stagnation that has occurred in some hostels and create places of change for people who are homeless or living in a hostel.



## 3. Who is benefiting from the programme?

The programme supports not only hostels but also non-accommodation based services such as day centres and social enterprises, however the people benefiting from the programme will be living in hostels when they start to use the services. The purpose of the programme is to help them to move on to sustainable independent living.

An enormous range of people live in hostels as a result of many different personal circumstances. Some people will be living in a hostel to tide them over after a financial problem or relationship breakdown; others will be people who have become socially excluded such as ex-offenders, drug users, vulnerable young people and people fleeing domestic violence. The one thing that links them is that they need a settled home. By encountering good services they will find routes into education, employment and ultimately sustained independent living in their own home.

### **Hostel residents at the centre of the programme through 'Service User Involvement'**

Even if the service has a high turnover, such as in a direct access hostel, the people using the service have an expert perspective on the effectiveness of the services they receive – they should be consulted regularly to make sure that the service meets their needs.

Many hostels have vibrant residents' committees and residents' meetings but this is not the only way to involve service users. Look Ahead, in London, train service users to: recruit staff (as part of interview



*“ The purpose of the programme is to help them to move on to sustainable independent living.”*

panel); conduct "Quality Assurance Audits" of hostel services; form a "Board Advisory Panel" to monitor the performance of Look Ahead; and make recommendations on operational matters that are then presented to the organisation's board. This has created a culture change towards greater choice and customer focus.

## CASE STUDY

### North East Lincolnshire Women's Aid

" Seeing the building in its current state is very exciting for me as I have been involved in the consultations and planning. In the beginning there were about 30 of us who met with Denise the manager and Mark the architect, to discuss the possibility of a new refuge.

" They asked us, if we could have a new refuge, how would we want it to be! We asked for things like our own bathrooms, our own kitchen and not to have to share a bedroom with our children. We still wanted communal rooms because sometimes we enjoyed being together and it helped us feel safer. The building is really taking shape and it is great that our ideas and comments were listened to and that women in the future will not only receive the support but will also have a really nice place to stay."

Elsa "service user"



*" we are all worthy of a decent standard irrespective of circumstance."*

## 4. Engaging Services

The moment a homeless person walks in the door of a hostel or other facility there should be opportunity on offer. This opportunity should be attractive and not institutional. Before we can ask

people to engage with their housing or complex personal problems, we need to start by making them feel safe, trusted and happy. So opportunities to play sport, make music or cook dinner can be a beginning that ultimately leads to a resolve to confront bigger long term issues. Once that resolve is in place there must be opportunities in the hostel to access training, education and job opportunities. College taster sessions, job coaching and social enterprise can all be offered on-site in facilities that inspire more than the old standard TV room and pool table. Easy-to-access activities can also have the added value of embedding learning in literacy and numeracy skills. For example,

young crack users attending DJ-ing classes in one St Mungo's hostel were able to pick up valuable life skills in a non-classroom environment through learning the names of tunes and how long the tracks last. Alongside the need to have housing pathways for hostel residents it is equally important to have employment pathways.



*“ Empowerment through Engagement, Education and Employment has long been our motto...”*

*“ Empowerment through Engagement, Education and Employment has long been our motto at Crisis and through Crisis Skylight we put this into practice every day of the year. Homelessness deskills and isolates, so the challenge for all of us working with homeless people is to reskill and integrate. We do this through providing the opportunities for homeless people to develop the skills and capabilities to end their own homelessness.”*

**Shaks Ghosh, Crisis Chief Executive, 1997 – 2006**

## CASE STUDY

### Tyneside Cyrenians

In Newcastle-upon Tyne, a group of hostel residents have built their own hostel and office extension. All the people involved in the scheme are studying for an NVQ Level 2 in Construction which makes them eligible for their Construction Skills Certification Scheme card – the construction industry’s “passport” for site workers. Within the first 20 weeks of the project almost all of the “self-builders” had moved into their own homes and now live independently. Tyneside Cyrenians

run the scheme with a local contractor and are providing the opportunity for their residents to take their place as confident, skilled members of their community, able to contribute socially and economically.



*“ This self-build project has given me the chance to get my life back on track. I honestly thought I was going to be unemployable for the rest of my life because of my drug problem and criminal history. The job has taught me so much as well and I’ve even got the qualifications to prove it. Now at the end of the project I have been offered a job with Lumsden & Carroll Construction which I’m delighted about. Things couldn’t be more different for me now than 7 months ago. I’ve even had the confidence to get back in touch with my family ”*

**Stuart ‘Self-Builder’**



## 5. Motivated staff

Hostel residents say that it is the way frontline-staff work with them that makes the biggest difference. Without skilled and motivated staff this programme cannot achieve its goals. The homelessness sector contains staff with exceptional people skills and commitment to work that is often mentally and emotionally draining. Many staff can experience burn-out. Recruitment and retention is a pressing issue in the sector and so appropriate recruitment, induction, supervision and continuing professional development are vital if the investment in staff training is to be effective. Insisting that 'two years experience in the homelessness sector is essential' is crippling some providers' ability to find new people with a fresh perspective from other sectors. Poor staff retention can ultimately have a negative impact on the client in a project. Being passed from one keyworker to another every few weeks can set people a long way back in the process of change.



*“ It's so nice to be somewhere where staff want to talk about my future.”*

From well thought out rotas to appropriate training for night staff, there are many ways in which staff can feel supported, motivated and valued.



## CASE STUDY

### Shekinah Mission Plymouth

In Plymouth, the Shekinah Mission run a drop-in centre for people who are homeless. They made the decision to embed education, training, employment and volunteering opportunities for clients throughout all of their services. For this to happen, a large investment was made in staff training and development. All staff (including managers) undertook the City & Guilds course "Supporting the Development Needs of Homeless and Vulnerable People". The training created opportunities to challenge and change individual attitudes and perceptions of the clients that they supported. The question that the course led staff to ask themselves was "Do we support homeless people or **people** who are homeless?"

Prior to this investment approximately 15-20 clients a year would secure employment and a further 15-20 clients would undertake some form of training. Since then approximately 60-70 clients a year return to work and a further 150-200 clients a year engage in a range of training and education programmes. A recent internal review quoted two clients as saying:

"It's so nice to be somewhere where staff want to talk about my future and not just talk about all my past problems, makes me feel good about myself".



*" Since then approximately 60-70 clients a year return to work and a further 150-200 clients a year engage in a range of training and education programmes."*

## 6. Welcoming Buildings

For adults to be put into shared rooms or dormitories can create an atmosphere of fear and low self esteem which works against helping people to rebuild their lives. The Hostels Capital Improvement Programme is only building single room accommodation.

The programme will deliver flagship and innovative buildings to house the delivery of services. Key elements are:

- a welcoming reception that is both open and safe;
- non-institutional decor;
- plenty of natural light and air;
- a flow of traffic that mixes staff and residents;
- lots of integrated activity spaces and if possible space and facilities to share with the local community.

*“ Hostels are not there to provide long term accommodation but to provide a pathway off the streets and into independent living. HCIP funding has given us the opportunity to work with cutting edge architects to revolutionise hostels into more accessible, open and interactive environments where rehabilitation, client involvement and opportunity are our priorities.”*

**Mike McCall, Executive Director of Operations – St Mungo’s**



## CASE STUDY

### Dawn Centre, Leicester

- “ Since moving to the centre we have had more people make planned positive moves into their own accommodation than in two years at our previous site.
- “ The Dawn Centre incorporates large open spaces where staff and users of services can freely move around. From the reception area all services can be easily accessed – accommodation, day centre facilities and primary health care. The partnership agencies have all benefited from working more closely within the same building – we feel like a family.
- “ The accommodation provides single bedrooms with en-suite facilities; this has had an enormous effect both in terms of integrity and privacy for the users of the service, less violence and aggression against all who use the centre, and damage to the building itself, it has built respect from our customers and has changed the culture of the groups we work with.
- “ The stained glass within the building was designed by local schoolchildren – colours within the glass were used to reflect the colours of the mosque situated at the end of the street. Internally the accommodation has used art and colour, with the service users being involved from the beginning, to send a message of aspiration, quality, respect and integrity as we are all worthy of a decent standard irrespective of circumstance.”



**Karen – Dawn Centre Manager**

“ *Gone are the labyrinthine, dark hostels with 'air locked, barricaded' entrances. Instead; open planned reception, circulation and activity spaces, often with delightful garden outlooks, create highly visible, inclusive environments.*”

**Phil Hamilton – Peter Barber Architects**

“ *I would have died if it was not for this wonderful building, facilities are excellent and on the whole no problems, it is fantastic compared to other hostels I have stayed in.*”

**Iqbal, Dawn Centre resident**

## 7. Being part of the community

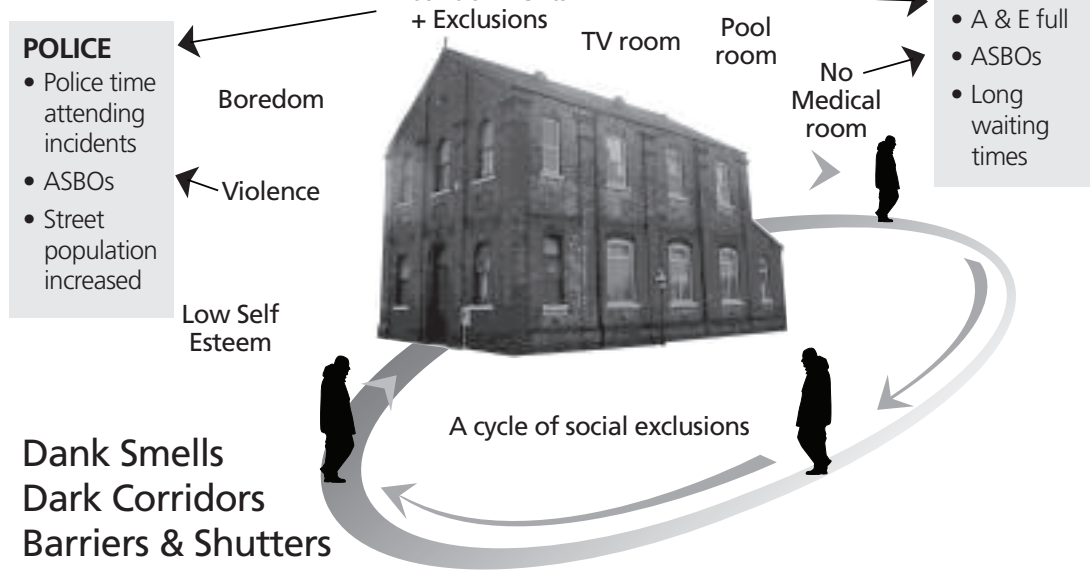
The London Borough of Camden are embarking on a major redevelopment of Arlington house, which is run by Novas. This is by far the biggest scheme in the programme and is often referred to as the “largest hostel in Europe”; it is a project with a unique place in the history of homelessness prevention in this country.



“ At Arlington we aim to de-institutionalise the building and the services provided not just through the physical design but also by integrating the building with the wider community. We aim to create jobs, social enterprises and arts based activities not only for homeless people but also disadvantaged people in the local area. Tackling inequality and prejudice through constructive and real initiatives, such as homeless people managing their own business or employed in the coffee shop or exhibiting in the quality art gallery space has a lasting and concrete impact, as well as empowering a very disadvantaged section of the community'.

**Michael Wake – Founder and Executive Director, Novas Group**

## A Poor Hostel



## Place of Change



With Thanks to the following organisations for the pictures in this publication.

Front cover:

Dawn Centre exterior, Leicester City Council  
Self Build Team, Tyneside Cyrenians  
Smiling couple, Cardboard Citizens  
Phoenix Landscaping business, Booth Centre  
Woman in workshop, St Mungo's  
DJ, St Mungo's  
Girl drumming, YMCA Coventry & Warwickshire

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Page 13: Plans for Arlington House, Novas  
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On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

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