



Creating Places of Change

**Lessons learnt from the Hostels Capital Improvement
Programme 2005–2008**



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Programme 2005–2008**

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November 2007

Product Code: 07HSL04945

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Acknowledgements

Communities and Local Government would like to thank the recipients of Hostels Capital Improvement (HCIP) grants who contributed to the development of this document and whose work is helping to deliver Places of Change outcomes.

Homeless Link, (especially Oliver Hilbery, Homeless Link Regional Managers)
Simon House, Oxford
Shekinah Mission, Plymouth
Crisis Learning Zone, London
St Mungo's
The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
Broadway
Chartered Institute of Housing
Dawn Centre, Leicester
Nightshelter, Blackpool
Thames Reach
YMCA, Birkenhead
East Lincolnshire Women's Aid
St George's Crypt, Leeds
The Bridge Project, Blackpool
Street League
Connections St Martin's
City and Hackney PCT
Leicester City PCT
Training for Life, Dartmouth
M25, Doncaster
North East Lincolnshire Women's Aid
Brent Families Homeless Group
Look Ahead Housing Group
York Arclight
Novas
Camden Council
Tyneside Cyrenians' Elliot House
St Basils

Section 1. Introduction

Since 2005 the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme (HCIP) has invested £90 million of capital grants in organisations serving homeless people.

This investment has improved the physical condition of homelessness services and provided items of capital equipment for associated activities. Whether large or small, the grants have supported services in becoming Places of Change.

Places of Change are centres of engagement and empowerment with a focus on activity, employment, education or training. Places that support people to make positive changes in their lives and move on to independent or more appropriate supported accommodation. They operate from welcoming buildings with motivated staff and service users engage with the local community.

The full vision behind the Places of Change agenda is outlined in Chapter 3.

Together with local authority and voluntary sector partners, the Hostels Capital Improvement Programme has contributed to sustained reductions in rough sleeping by supporting people towards settled homes and changing lives.

It has set a new standard for the quality of the physical environment in homelessness projects and a benchmark for the provision of services and activities to homeless people, including professional staffing and service user involvement.

This document is based on the experiences of the local authorities and their voluntary sector partners who received Hostels Capital Improvement Programme (HCIP) funding over the last three years. Communities and Local Government would like to thank them for their involvement in the consultation.

Among the completed HCIP schemes there have been some highly positive outcomes:

- Before redevelopment 40 per cent of residents moved on to something positive. That figure is now 75 per cent. *Simon House, Oxford*
- The Steady Work programme, which provides training in trades such as plastering and plumbing, has tripled the number of people moving into work. *Shekinah Mission, Plymouth*
- Last year 295 people enrolled and 250 completed accredited qualifications. *Crisis Learning Zone, London*
- Hostel residents selected architects and were part of interviewing panel when recruiting staff in the hostel. *Birkenhead St/Cromwell Rd, St Mungo's*
- There was a 75 per cent reduction in exclusions and abandonments. *The Dawn Centre, Leicester*
- Since the refurbishment, 75 per cent of staff at Conningham Road gained the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Support Work. *Broadway, London*
- The decision to build a 'boutique hotel' environment with high quality fixtures and fittings has resulted in no reports of damage since opening. *Nightshelter, Blackpool*
- Hard to reach clients are being engaged through a series of new activities, such as power boating qualifications. *YMCA, Birkenhead*

Section 2. The Places of Change Programme

To continue this work, Communities and Local Government has announced a new round of capital grants for homelessness services from April 2008. The Places of Change Programme (PCP) will invest £70 million over the next three years.

Places of Change Programme: Application Guidance outlines the full requirements for applications to the new Programme. It is available at www.communities.gov.uk/housing/homelessness/placeschange

2.1. This Document

This document is intended to help organisations considering an application to the PCP by outlining the vision behind the Places of Change agenda and the past experiences of HCIP projects.

After the overall vision (Chapter 3), the document looks at the main strands of Places of Change:

- Buildings (Chapter 4)
- Services and Activities (Chapter 5)
- Staffing (Chapter 6)

It then examines the process of project planning for a capital development, covering information that may be relevant for both major work and smaller alterations (Chapter 7):

- The Idea
- Detailed Planning
- During the Works
- Opening the Service

Although the wording of this document may focus on the redevelopment of hostels, the issues raised also apply to non accommodation schemes.

Section 3. The Vision

The best HCIP projects had aspirations to change the service they offered to homeless people. They did this by using a capital grant to meet Places of Change outcomes.

The main outcome of Hostel Capital Improvement Programme was:

- *To increase the number of clients positively moving on to independent or more appropriate supported accommodation*

Meeting the following outcomes helped this to be achieved:

- *To increase the number of clients engaging in meaningful activity, employment, education or training and with the community*
- *To reduce the number of exclusions and abandonments*
- *To develop well-trained, motivated and supported staff*
- *To provide a quality physical environment*
- *To involve residents in the development of services*

HCIP projects met these outcomes by concentrating on a number of main strands:

Buildings

- Could no longer be recognised as institutional environments for homeless people. The old, tired buildings were replaced with places where the design focussed on the aspirations of residents and the ability of staff to deliver services and activities in an effective and welcoming building.

Services and activities

- Were designed around residents' aspirations and interests and led to useful skills, real change and the possibility of college and work.

Staff

- Were the best, recruited from a range of sectors. They were supported through good management, training, sensible rotas and appropriate staffing levels.

Involvement

- The development process did not begin until service users and staff had provided input into all aspects of the scheme.

Reach

- A wide number of funding streams contributed to HCIP projects because the Places of Change outcomes were relevant across many government departments and projects offered services to many socially excluded groups.

Section 4. Buildings

The best HCIP schemes developed buildings that:

Reduced the number of bed spaces and increased flexible space

- Schemes recognised that by reducing bed spaces they were increasing the quality of their service.
- They created training, social enterprise and communal space that could be used for a variety of purposes, resulting in a more efficient project, with greater numbers of people using and benefiting from the service.
- ‘Electric keys’ allowed buildings to be structured to meet different needs or internal progression.
- Specific space for clinics and health services enabled provision of these services.

Removed dormitory provision and involuntary sharing

- Dormitory provision was removed, because although it may have filled a need in the past there was no longer a place for it in schemes. The culture of fear in a crowded room with no privacy, noise and the potential for abuse presented an unacceptable operational risk.

Fed service users views into the plans

- Service user involvement at the *North East Lincolnshire Women’s Aid Domestic Violence Project* ensured that the shape and fabric of the building was fit for purpose. Windows were included to overlook the reception in case abusive ex-partners tried to access the centre, a peace garden was built to give mothers space for a break, and the pram room was moved to be nearer the entrance. The architect regularly attended service users meetings to check progress against their views.

Had welcoming, hotel-style receptions

- Removing barriers and glass screens dramatically reduced violent incidences at reception. *Simon House, Oxford* reported no incidents since its reception area was redesigned.
- An open reception was more welcoming and showed respect to service users.

Had communal areas to encourage interaction between service users and staff, balanced with the need for private space

- Poorly designed buildings had previously led to staff staying in their offices and not interacting with service users or other staff. Key working and staff relationships benefited greatly from informal, relaxed, meetings in the communal areas that an open building allowed.

Were naturally lit, open, and of a high quality

- Old schemes often had long corridors and enclosed spaces with lingering odours. Natural light and air and a high quality finish brought obvious health benefits and removed the feeling of an institutional atmosphere.
- Good material choices de-institutionalised the building. For example, clear windows rather than wired glass; doors that were homely but hardwearing.
- Bespoke built-in furniture was used if the room size was unavoidably restrictive. Some schemes ordered furniture at the last minute and this left rooms cramped and difficult to use.
- Projects weren't afraid of brave and innovative buildings as they recognised that this could increase the positive aspirations of those who entered their doors. Places of Change was evident in the design of the building as well as the services and activities delivered.
- The attitude of service users towards their environment was markedly changed for the better and exclusions and abandonments reduced as a result.
- Buildings were designed to fit with the local built environment and meet or exceed environmental and sustainability requirements.
- St George's Crypt's project harvests its rainwater to flush toilets, uses solar power to provide electricity and brings in natural light through "sun tubes" that redirect the sun into gloomy corridors.

Turned yards into gardens

- *Blackpool nightshelter* used photographs on external walls and bedding plants to turn a yard into an attractive place to sit. Welcoming outside space provided a healthy area for activities or relaxing and the smoking restrictions made it a desirable element of the scheme. It also sends a powerful message to the community that the project and its service users are contributing positively to the life of the neighbourhood.

Included space for pets and couples

- Provision for couples was incorporated, backed by clear procedures and agreements from the outset.
- With advice from the Dog's Trust and other animal welfare charities, pets were managed safely. The ground floor of *The Dawn Centre, Leicester* included small outdoor kennels attached to the rooms.

Section 5. Services and Activities

The best HCIP projects provided services and activities with the following elements:

Engagement

- Services and activities engaged and interested people that had grown to mistrust most interventions. They provided approaches that were fun and allowed vulnerable people to gain self-respect and a network of friends. The changes that follow could result in measurable outcomes such as college, a job or a home, but this was often unachievable without the initial work around engagement.
- Some projects utilised skills already present in the staff team, which had the added effect of energising team members and increasing staff retention. At *Birkenhead YMCA* they engaged hard to reach residents by offering a qualification in Powerboat driving. At the end of a 3 day course they navigated across the Mersey, one of Europe's busiest riverways, gaining skills, confidence and gaining a qualification recognised by all boatyards in Liverpool.
- *The Bridge Project*, Blackpool projected empowering words and images onto the wall of its day centre to engage people on a course of learning. Between April and July 2007, 109 service users registered with the learning centre and all had personal development plans. Of these, 41 attended sufficiently to graduate from the course. Twenty-five received certificates for specific learning and another 8 received AQA certificates.

Education

- Vital skills such as literacy and numeracy were embedded into engagement activities. For example, by attending DJ classes people mixing tracks learnt the names of bands and how long the tracks lasted. *Street League* used football to raise awareness of health issues and direct people into learning and employment – you also need to be able to read the team names and tot up the points.
- Many homeless people were disconnected from learning and engaging them with mainstream education was challenging. However, there were success stories, for example, once people had engaged with the many activities on offer at the *Crisis Learning Zone*, such as bicycle maintenance, art, karate and music, they could formalise their education with accredited courses and qualifications.

Employment

- HCIP projects showed that service users could be helped into employment and that this was not beyond their capabilities – a belief that was too often reported by providers.
- *Connection Crew* linked service users from *Connections St. Martins* (a central London day centre) to employment opportunities in the events industry to work with professional crews erecting equipment in London's largest venues.
- The *Steady Work* programme run by *Shekinah Mission* in Plymouth taught service users the trades of plastering and plumbing. Trainees helped build their day centre and many progressed to local building firms.
- At *Stoke YMCA* residents applied for jobs within the centre, for example reception, maintenance or office work. Staff then provided links to local businesses and a CV that carried experience and no mention of homelessness.
- In London a fine dining events company "Beyond Boyle" based at *House of St Barnabas* trained homeless people, many of whom progressed to college or full time employment.

Involvement of service users

- Service users helped schemes to design services and activities through well-managed consultation. This ensured relevance, but also promoted a culture of responsibility in those who lived in or visited the project.
- Service and activity timetables allowed for drop in taster sessions and fitted around service users other commitments.
- St Mungo's service user group "Outside In" were part of the panel that included the local authority that interviewed and selected the architects for the hostel in Birkenhead St. They were also part of the interview process when selecting a manager for the Cromwell Road hostel.

Health

- Projects recognised the need for access to health care for service users and the wider homeless community.
- *City and Hackney PCT* in partnership with *Thames Reach* and *St Mungo's* set up the *Greenhouse Walk In*, a facility combining housing and welfare advice with an NHS service offering primary medical care to homeless and vulnerably housed people, including those misusing substances and street sex workers. A jointly recruited centre manager will run the facility. Key success factors included recognition of the case for joined up services, willingness from all parties to find solutions and persistence in developing a joint project working with homeless and vulnerably housed people in East London.

- *The Dawn Centre* is a multi-agency service for homeless people in Leicester, which builds on a long history of joint working between the Local Authority, primary health care, mental health services and the voluntary sector. Bridge building between the agencies concerned began at street level, with a ten year history of weekly multi-agency meetings to coordinate the holistic care of rough sleepers and those at risk of sleeping rough. The robust but trusting relationships which emerged from this process helped in negotiating operating systems for the service in order to maximise accessibility for vulnerable and excluded individuals. The result is a purpose built centre which combines a 42 bed direct access hostel and base for street outreach run by Leicester City Council, a drop-in centre offering a wide range of support and training activities run by the YMCA, and a health centre run by Leicester City PCT. The health centre provides the full range of primary health care services and hosts daily open access clinics for mental health workers. Working from excellent joint facilities has strengthened a shared ethos of reaching out to homeless people and collaborating to meet their needs.

Social Enterprise

- Projects included social enterprise only after close consideration of whether the development of a social business was right for the organisation or whether external links should be created instead.
- Businesses were based on strong market research, business planning and budgets that were flexible once trading had started (this did not exclude attempting business in innovative markets). They were strongly marketed and were run by someone with entrepreneurial flair.
- Social enterprises focussed on getting service users into permanent mainstream employment. They were preferably off-site to encourage service users away from their lodgings.
- “Training for Life” are award winning entrepreneurs and their HCIP funded project in Dartmouth is an old converted church overlooking the estuary which will contain a 14-bed hostel and a restaurant/music venue providing training, jobs and mentoring from the kitchens to front-of-house. The community have welcomed it despite the disparity between its homeless people and the affluent local residents – they see it as providing a useful service for their community.

Links to the community and external partners

- Partnerships with (specialist) external providers were essential in creating sustainable services and activities. External providers made funding available while homelessness services provided the space and related support – M25 in Doncaster used HCIP money to build 3 new training areas that could be used flexibly thanks to some moveable partition walls. Outside agencies come in and use these rooms to deliver a range of activities from Music groups to delivering the Learning Power award. They bring their funding with them so no new revenue was needed from the project itself.
- Activities and services provided in HCIP projects created strong links to mainstream provision so that service users could access this when they felt comfortable within local communities.
- Services and activities were offered to other groups in the community, both homeless and non-homeless. Use of services and activities by the local community reduced local concerns about projects and led to fruitful new partnerships and opportunities.
- Increased levels of engagement with drug, mental health and resettlement services were reported as a result of the activities and services provided.

Section 6. Staffing

The Best HCIP projects:

Considered realistic staffing levels and requirements for the new service

- Made an assessment of support and training needs for frontline workers and managers.
- Were flexible about staff roles and built Places of Change outcomes into all job descriptions and recruitment processes.
- Retained or re-deployed staff during the decant period.
- Supported staff to engage with the Places of Change agenda and did not retain those who would not.
- Created a rota that allowed key workers to spend some time as a meaningful occupation worker. This provided a break from their caseload and allowed them to develop their skills in other areas.

“Leading Places of Change” – a leadership training programme

Transformations of homelessness services require more than a capital investment – it’s about the people.

Leading Places of Change is looking for the homelessness sector’s next generation of leaders. The programme will help them to understand the Places of Change vision and support them in the development of an organisational culture which drives the provision of these new style services and is underpinned by a framework of excellent management practices.

The Programme, funded by Communities and Local Government, has been devised for service managers and developed jointly by CIH, Homeless Link and Broadway. It consists of ten days training with research and analysis projects carried out by delegates between modules.

On successful completion of the programme participants will be awarded the Leading Places of Change Qualification, which entitles them to membership of CIH.

Although the programme has been funded to support the development of projects which have received HCIP funding managers from other projects are welcome to attend by paying a subsidised fee

