

**LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES
HOMELESSNESS FORUM**
**Minutes of the meeting held in the Salon, York House, Twickenham,
on Wednesday 9th February 2011 at 2.00 pm**

Present:

Layo Afuape	LB Richmond, Emergency Duty Team
Elisabeth Bamber	CAB Twickenham
Pardip Barmi	Refuge
Carol Barker	Jobcentre Plus
Annette Blake	SPEAR
Debi Blaxill	MID Mediation & Counselling
Cllr Frances Bouchier	LB Richmond
Dan Butler	LB Richmond, Housing & Wellbeing
Richard Clift	CAB Twickenham
Ian Curry	Jobcentre Plus
Helen Cuthbert	Victim Support
Ken Emerson	LB Richmond, Housing Operations
Val Farmer	Richmond Borough Mind
Sarah Filby	LB Richmond, Housing & Wellbeing
Patsi Goop	Centrepoint
Karen Hopkins	LB Richmond, Housing & Wellbeing
Bridget Jones	Richmond College
John Leavy	NH Trust, Adult Mental Health
Jonathan Monckton	Richmond Parish Lands Charity
Laura Nicholls	Life Housing
Michael Opitz	LB Richmond, Leaving Care Team
Brian Short	Richmond Borough Mind, Vineyard Project
Keith Sangster	Richmond upon Thames Churches Housing Trust
Lisa Sharp	LB Richmond Youth Service, Heatham House
Harriet Smith	Richmond Housing Partnership
Sheri Tanner	LB Richmond, Benefits Policy Officer
Annette Thomas	Stonham
Darren Thornton	MCA
James Tompsett	Stonham
Ed Tytherleigh (Chair)	SPEAR
Cllr Nicki Urquhart	LB Richmond
Beverly Walsh	Age Concern
Cass Williams	St Christopher's Fellowship

Apologies:

Trevor Akerman	LB Richmond, Leaving Care Team
Jane Bailey	NHS Richmond
Nell Blane	LB Richmond, Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service
Amy Cheswick	Richmond upon Thames Churches Housing Trust
Jenny Edwards	Homeless Link
Sue Fox	LB Richmond, Mental Health
Clare Granger	SPEAR
Angela Gray	Connexions Twickenham
Joanna Gregory	Richmond Furniture Scheme

Alison Heaslewood
Catherine Howard
Surinder Kaur
Martha Kelly
Deborah Kerpner
Jane McInerney
Gavin Rodgers
Tony Sakim
Nicky Simpson
Barbara Thorn
Linda Toulmin

Thames Valley Housing Association
Kingston & Richmond Law Centre
EMAG
Centrepont
Richmond Youth Partnership
LB Richmond, Housing & Wellbeing Team
London & Quadrant
SPEAR
LB Richmond, Housing & Wellbeing Team
Connexions Kingston & Richmond
Richmond Housing Partnership

1. Welcome and Introductions

Ed Tytherleigh, Chair, welcomed Forum Members to the meeting and explained that this was a special meeting to look at the issues regarding Housing Benefit changes announced in the June 2010 emergency budget, which were raised in the meeting of 11th October 2010.

Members introduced themselves and apologies for absence were noted.

2. Housing Benefit Changes from April 2011

Sheri Tanner, Benefits Policy Officer LBRuT, outlined the key Housing Benefit changes that will come into effect from April 2011 and their impact locally:

- The rate used to work out housing benefit will be based on the size of property that is needed and not what the tenant has.
- Single people under the age of 25 without children will be expected to live in shared accommodation with two exceptions: care leavers under 22 and people receiving the middle/higher rate of Disability Living Allowance care.
- LHA rates are split into geographical areas within the borough: Outer South West London; Inner South West London; Outer West London.
- From April 2011 the LHA 5 bedroom rate will be removed and the £15 Housing Benefit 'excess' will no longer be applied.
- From April 2011 the maximum LHA payable for each property size will be capped. In Richmond, the Mortlake and Barnes area (Inner SW London) is expected to be affected as the rent for a 4 bedroom property exceeds the £400 limit being set.
- LHA rates will be set at the 30th percentile of rents in the area rather than the median therefore only 3 in 10 properties for rent in the area will be affordable to people on HB rather than 5 in 10 properties as now.
- The changes will apply to new claims after 1st April 2011. Customers already in receipt of LHA will not be affected straight away; claims are reviewed 52 weeks from the date of claim. There will also be a period of 9 months from the anniversary date before the new rate becomes payable.

- Customers who receive LHA have received notification of the impending changes.
- This issue is being taken very seriously as it is recognised that there will be a big impact on customers and council officers have been briefed about the changes.
- Discretionary housing payments are made from a fund which is completely separate from HB and has separate legislation. It is available for customers who face real hardship in meeting their housing costs. Richmond's allocation will not cover everyone with a shortfall as a result of the changes to LHA.
- There will be a new discretion available to pay LHA direct to a landlord. It has been introduced to give landlords an incentive to reduce the rent to a level that is affordable to HB customers.
- From April 2011 for disabled people who need an overnight carer the HB rules will now take into account the need for an additional bedroom.
- From April 2011 deductions for non-dependent adults living in the household will also start to increase.
- The shared accommodation rate will apply to under 35s from April 2012.
- Ed Tytherleigh noted that SPEAR are currently carrying out a national pilot with Homeless Link offering rent guarantee insurance which will give landlords some security. Details of this scheme will be distributed with the minutes.
- Findings from some research being carried out by London councils show that some landlords will be willing to reduce their rents.
- The environmental health team will need to ensure that the standards of rented property are met. Properties in Richmond are generally well kept.

3. Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

Ian Curry, Richmond and Kingston Partnership Manager, Jobcentre Plus, informed the meeting that Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is just one of many changes.

- From 28th February 2011 existing incapacity benefit claimants (those on incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance and income support on disability grounds) will be reassessed under the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Work Capability Assessment (WCA). Those assessed fully capable of work will be invited to make a claim for Jobseekers' Allowance or will move off benefits. Those who cannot work or have limited capability to work will move on to ESA.
- A trial has been carried out in Aberdeen and Burnley where customers who receive benefits on the grounds of illness or disability have been assessed for ESA.
- As part of the reassessment process, the majority of customers will undergo a work capability assessment.
- 2.6 million people will go through this process over the next three years.

- Research shows that work can promote recovery from both mental and physical health problems.
- 250,000 people are expected to leave benefits entirely as a result of the shift to ESA.
- A customer who is eligible for ESA will be transferred automatically and will not see a reduction in the level of their benefit entitlement at the point of change.
- There will be mandatory training opportunities and everyone will be entitled to a full range of support from Jobcentre Plus to enable them to move into the workplace.
- If a customer is placed in the ESA Support Group because their illness or disability has a severe effect on their ability to work, they will not be expected to take part in any work related activity in order to receive their benefit.
- If a customer is found capable of work they may be able to claim Jobseeker's Allowance. Some customers may also be entitled to receive Income Support on other grounds.
- Any customer moving off incapacity benefits will be signposted and referred to the right agencies to enable them to receive other benefits that they could be entitled to.
- All customers will receive a letter regarding the changes and the Jobcentre Plus Contact Centre will call them to find out if they require any extra help. They will be informed that they will be receiving a medical questionnaire to establish how their health condition affects their ability to work.
- Once a health form has been completed, the customer will receive a telephone call from Atos Healthcare to say that a work capability assessment will be carried out.
- If a customer appeals a decision, benefits remain in place whilst the appeal process is underway.

Further information can be obtained from the DirectGov website:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/Illorinjured/DG_188859

or by contacting Ian Curry:

- Telephone: 020 8481 3040
- Email: Ian.Curry@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

4. Potential Closure of the Vineyard Project

Val Farmer, Chief Executive of RB Mind, explained that since the briefing note was distributed the inevitable closure of the Vineyard was approved at a Management Committee Meeting on Monday 7th February 2011. There will be an impact on organisations represented at the Homelessness Forum.

RB Mind have been aware for a number of months about the potential closure of the Vineyard Project and have been in consultation with stakeholders and service users to establish their needs in the event of closure. Although a plan has yet to be finalised, RB Mind are keen to carry out risk assessments with clients.

A stakeholders' meeting has been arranged for Wednesday 16th February and is being co-ordinated by Cllr Fleming. The meeting will take place at 8.00 am in Zac Goldsmith's offices. Organisations who can actively do something for service users are being invited; churches, SPEAR, CAB, potential funders. To be a part of the solution, members of the Forum were invited to attend the meeting. It was suggested that the Director of Public Health is invited to the meeting.

50% of people who use the facilities at the Vineyard Project are homeless.

Val Farmer is happy to receive comments in order to formulate a forward plan. She will report back to the next Homelessness Forum on Monday 21st March 2011.

8. Future Meetings

Monday 21st March 2011 at 2.00 pm – The Salon, York House,
Twickenham

The meeting ended at 3.30 p.m.