

LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

HOMELESSNESS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at York House on
Monday 12 May 2008 at 2 p.m.

Present:

Elisabeth Bamber	Twickenham Citizens Advice Bureau
Louise Brice	LBRUT
Tom Bush	SPEAR
Dan Butler	Housing Strategy & Development, LBRUT
Richard Clip	Twickenham Citizens Advice Bureau
Rachel Dickson	Vineyard Project/Furniture Scheme
Ken Emerson	LBRUT
Joanna Gregory	Furniture Scheme/MIND
Beryl Hawkins	Clerk (LBRUT)
Jo Harper	LBRUT
Bill Hewlett	HQN
Bridget Jones	Richmond College
Surinder Kane	EMAG
Rebecca Mear	Refugee Action Kingston
Debbie Provencale	Mediation in Divorce
Claire Roberts	LBRUT
Nicky Simpson	LBRUT
Ed Tytherleigh (In the Chair)	SPEAR
Linda Toulmin	Lettings Manager, RHP
Eleni Walia	Housing Services, LBRUT
Beverley Walsh	Age Concern, Richmond

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Paul Anderson, Head of London and the SE Homeless Link; Nell Blane, YP Drug & Alcohol Support, Powerstation; Matt Hatton, Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness; Jonathan Monckton, Richmond Parish Lands; Ehud Sivosh, Citizens Advice Bureau; Rob Thomson, Vineyard Project; and Penny Wade, Homelessness Forum Chair.

2. INTRODUCTIONS

All present introduced themselves to other members of the Forum.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS

The minutes of the meetings held on 24 September and 17 December 2007 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. PRESENTATION BY BILL HEWLETT FROM HOUSING QUALITY NETWORK (HQN) CONSULTANTS ON THE HOMELESSNESS REVIEW

Bill Hewlett gave a presentation on the completion of the Homelessness Review and how the action plan can be delivered. (Members received a copy of the presentation notes.) The Forum noted that:

- The review covered statutory and non-statutory homelessness.
- The trend in homelessness has been a downward over the last three years.
- Put in the contexts of the Sub-region, London and England as a whole, homelessness in Richmond is relatively low.
- The review found that 16 and 17 year olds comprised 16.8% of homelessness cases – this translated to 27 young people.
- No repeat homelessness had been recorded since April 2006.
- Although the Council has been successful in reducing homelessness at a greater rate than for London and England as a whole, there is a need to continually monitor homelessness prevention initiatives.
- The number of households losing private rented accommodation has risen slightly – suggesting a need to continue preventative work in this area.
- There is a need to extend the sharing of good practice within the Sub-region.
- The Rent Deposit Scheme had been successful in assisting a high number of households in taking up private rented sector tenancies.
- The November 2007 housing conference on Improving Financial Opportunities had led to positive actions.
- Work had begun on setting up a credit union and the Council was in the top quartile for performance on Housing Benefit.
- The Council has a good corporate approach to providing information, support and advice. There is a need to build on this and to ensure that tenants as well as landlords receive good support.
- There is a need to ensure consistently high standards across all services. This needs to be high on the local authority's agenda.
- There is a need to review joint working arrangements between the Council and other organisations.
- There is a need to assess the support available to single homeless people with mild learning difficulties.
- There is a need to review the ways in which the needs of rough sleepers are addressed.
- There is a need to ensure that the right agencies work together to address the needs of drug misusers.
- The Council has good strategies in place to address the needs of young people. Provision needs to link into the national agenda and new opportunities should be taken up.
- There is a need to give further consideration to provision for women suffering domestic violence.
- There is a need to ensure that stakeholders feel staff have received adequate training and induction, have knowledge of local service

- provision and have sensitivity when working with victims of abuse.
- There is a need to ensure that services for black and minority ethnic households are accessible.
 - The Probation Service identified that 37% of offenders had an accommodation problem – this is a cause for concern.
 - A report on a London-wide accommodation assessment of gypsies and travellers is imminent and should be reviewed for potential issues relating to homelessness.
 - Protocols for joint working should be subject to regular review and new protocols added to assist joint working.
 - Some provision is made for non-statutory homeless people. These services should be further developed.
 - The strategy should ensure that the provision of support is relevant.
 - The Council appears to be on course to meet the government target of reducing the number of homeless households in Richmond in temporary accommodation to 254 by 2010.
 - The appointment of a dedicated officer for households in temporary accommodation has had a positive impact on reducing use of temporary accommodation.
 - An assessment of the accommodation needs of homeless young males has already been undertaken, and a new 4 bed unit has been opened. There is now a need to assess the accommodation needs of homeless female young people.
 - The reduction in the percentage of homeless households taking up nominations could be an indicator of a decrease in opportunities for people on the housing register.
 - A review of the terms of reference and membership of the Homelessness Forum should take into account the need to increase opportunities for joint working and raise awareness across agencies.
 - The key aims of the strategy are:
 - to reduce homelessness;
 - to reduce levels of rough sleeping to as close to zero as possible;
 - to meet the government's 2010 target for reducing temporary accommodation;
 - to end, by 2010, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation in discharging the Council's homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.

Bill wished to record thanks to those organisations who had worked with the Council to address the needs of rough sleepers. Bill also wished to thank all stakeholders who had contributed to the consultation.

Bill answered questions from Forum members. Arising therefrom:

- It was noted that changes in the law on homelessness made it easier for some people such as young people and care leavers to be accepted as homeless.
- There was a need to ensure that the role of advocate was clear and that it could be developed in a productive way.
- It was noted that economic conditions would have a bigger impact on

newer landlords than those who were more established. However, Richmond was considered to be one of the most recession-proof boroughs. Areas with cheaper properties were more vulnerable.

- All properties rented through the rent deposit scheme are required to pass quality checks and meet building regulations requirements.

Ed Tytherleigh asked for help from Forum members in finding suitable accommodation to meet the needs of four to five multiply disadvantaged people.

It was noted that:

- Housing associations have a key role to play in helping to ensure that eviction is a last resort.
- Richmond Housing Partnership delivers a number of services that are available to tenants.
- Spear has a rough sleepers helpline.
- Spear is working in partnership with the Council on a £1 million project to provide accommodation for single homeless people. This provision will not be available until the end of 2009. It might be possible to divert funding for overcrowding in order to meet the immediate needs of this group.

6. PRESENTATION BY KEN EMERSON, HEAD OF HOUSING OPERATIONS - LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

Ken Emerson, Head of Housing Operations, spoke about the consultation on the borough's Housing Strategy. The Forum noted that:

- Jo Harper is currently Team Leader, Housing Advice & Assessment.
- The new Mayor of London will be producing a new housing strategy.
- Wider consultation will include consulting residents' panels and speaking to stakeholders, such as young people.
- Young people will be consulted through the Youth Forum and regional champions.
- The strategy will need to link in to separate strategies
- Housing associations need to be more directly involved with the work of the Housing Corporation.
- There will be some local authority pathfinders for dealing with overcrowding. Accommodation will in future be assessed on the bedroom standard, which is more generous than that in use in the recent past.
- Quality of life and prevention of homelessness will be key components of the strategy.
- As for the previous consultation, it is intended to establish three focus groups.
- Bids will be invited for enhanced housing options. The ten successful bids will be awarded for making best use of accommodation. Half have already applied.
- Meetings will take place throughout the summer, with a view to the

- revised strategy being up and running by the end of the summer.
- The Safety First scheme – a sanctuary scheme that allows people to live in their own homes – has worked well. It is intended that this should be expanded and relaunched.
 - The strategy will be drafted by the Council by looking at what has been done before, updating it and producing a new action plan for consultation. The action plan will focus on the seven key objectives identified in the homelessness review:
 - prevent homelessness
 - enable access to settled housing in the private rented sector
 - ensure that temporary accommodation provides a ‘stepping stone’ to a settled home and lifestyle
 - reduce homelessness amongst young people
 - enable people to live independently through support
 - enable access to social housing for homeless households
 - promote effective partnership working.
 - As key stakeholders, Forum members will be consulted by being invited to join the focus groups.

8. HOMELESS LONDON

Eleni Walia, tabled a presentation and information sheet on Homeless London – a new resource information website giving details of around 1,470 services across London that offer hostels, advice and support to help homeless people. Full details are available on the site – www.homelesslondon.org.

9. LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCE SAFEGUARD POLICY

Eleni Walia tabled the London Borough of Richmond’s Local Housing Allowance Safeguard Policy and referral form for requesting direct payment to the landlord.

10. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING FORUM

The Homelessness Forum noted that there would be a meeting of the Private Sector Housing Forum at York House on Wednesday 14 May 2008 at 6.30 p.m. The agenda included a presentation on the role of the Rent Service in the Local Housing Allowance.

11. ROUGH SLEEPERS

Ed Tytherleigh invited Forum members to take copies of Spear’s helpline flyer for rough sleepers and homeless people.

12. NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held at York House, Twickenham, on Monday 15 September 2008 from 2 to 3.30 p.m.

The meeting ended at 3.20 p.m.