

# LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES

## HOMELESSNESS FORUM

Minutes of the meeting held at York House on  
Monday 24 September 2007 at 2 p.m.

### Present:

Trevor Akerman	LBRUT
Kathryn Beatham	Refugee Action Kingston
Dan Butler	Housing Strategy & Development, LBRUT
Bryan Crystal	Social Worker, Richmond – West, Community Mental Health Team
Helen Cuthbert	Victim Support, Richmond
Ken Emerson	LBRUT
Matt Hatton	Kingston Churches Action on Homelessness
Beryl Hawkins	Clerk (LBRUT)
Anna Henderson	Richmond Churches Housing Trust
Bridget Jones	Richmond College
Louise Kidman	Richmond Churches Housing Trust
Manuel Navarro	LBRUT
Laura Nicholls	Life Housing
Tracy Norman	Life Housing
Charlotte Roffey	LBRUT
Sheri Tanner	Revenues & Benefits, LBRUT
Ed Tytherleigh	Spear
Penny Wade (Chair)	Homelessness Forum
Eleni Walia	Housing Services, LBRUT

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Richard Campbell, Youth Café Bus; Pam Pilkington; Surinder, EMAG Project Co-ordinator; Dionne John-Baptiste, Centrepoint; Jane Clark, Principal Manager, Services for Adults; Katie Erskine, Outreach Worker, Children's Directorate; David Sidonio, Chief Executive, RCVS; Clare Lambert, YOT, Paul Anderson, Homeless Link; Nell Blane, YPDAT, Andrea Baker, RHP, Jo Underwood, Kingston & Richmond Law Centre.

### 2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2007 were agreed as an accurate record.

### 3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- (a) **Primary Care Nurse (Ref: Minute 3)** Ed Tytherleigh reported that extensive enquiry had confirmed that funding for a dedicated nurse for people using The Vineyard Project had been withdrawn.

He stated that Spear would be prepared to advocate public health spending and agreed to contact The Vineyard Project.

- (b) Vineyard Project (Ref: Minute 5)** Penny Wade reported that Joy Pocock had left The Vineyard Project and that Rob Thomson had taken over as manager. The Project was continuing in spite of a threat of funding cuts that would affect staffing levels.

#### **4. PRESENTATION BY SHERI TANNER, REVENUES & BENEFITS, LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES, ON THE LOCAL HOUSING ALLOWANCE**

Sheri Tanner presented a paper on the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), a new way of calculating Housing Benefit for people who rent from the deregulated private sector, to be introduced from 7 April 2008. The Forum noted that:

- Social sector tenants would not be affected initially, but that if the government was satisfied that the new scheme was working successfully it might wish to extend it.
- There would be a flat rate entitlement, usually payable directly to the tenant, based on geographical area and size of household.
- Richmond residents would be in either Inner South West London or Outer South West London and the same rates would apply across the whole of each area.
- Levels would be set by an independent agency.
- A list of rates would be published each month, in advance;
- The DWP's (Department of Work and Pensions) aims in introducing the scheme were to promote fairness, choice, transparency and personal responsibility.
- The local authority would be required to have a safeguard policy to identify tenants who were likely to have difficulty in managing their own affairs or claimants who were unlikely to pay the rent.
- The Richmond website was being updated to reflect the changes.

Forum members were concerned that Richmond landlords and residents would stand to lose by the introduction of the scheme. Although there were plenty of buy-to-let properties available in the borough, the gap between Housing Benefit and what people were paying in rents was already widening.

Sheri stated that any difficulties with payment of rents would be flagged up after two months, whereas under the current arrangements landlords often wait a lot longer than this before reporting problems. Forum members were advised to indicate when new claims were submitted if they were concerned about tenants' ability to pay.

For more information on the LHA log onto [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk) or [www.richmond.gov.uk/home/housing/housing\\_benefits](http://www.richmond.gov.uk/home/housing/housing_benefits).

If you would like a copy of the handout for the meeting please contact [e.walia@richmond.gov.uk](mailto:e.walia@richmond.gov.uk).

**5. PRESENTATION BY DAN BUTLER, PRINCIPAL OFFICER, POLICY & RESEARCH AND ELENI WALIA, HOUSING INITIATIVES OFFICER, LONDON BOROUGH OF RICHMOND UPON THAMES**

Dan Butler stated that:

- Every local authority was required to be in general conformity with the Mayor's housing strategy.
- The Mayor's draft strategy for reducing high homelessness, associated with poor life chances and access to health, included:
  - providing more affordable housing;
  - reducing BME homelessness;
  - reducing the use of temporary accommodation;
  - reducing the number of 16 and 17 year olds in B&B accommodation before the 2010 target;
  - increasing the number of tenants moving from temporary accommodation to permanent schemes;
  - improving advice services;
  - improving security for tenants in the private rented sector;
  - reducing non-statutory homelessness;
  - developing the role of London's hostels;
  - reviewing the government's programme for training and employment
  - developing professional work across boundaries
  - addressing the homelessness and health needs of rough sleepers.
- Richmond's priorities included the areas of:
  - refugees and asylum seekers;
  - prevention of homelessness;
  - cross-boundary working;
  - health and training;
  - 16-17 year olds;
  - rough sleepers.
- Richmond would be carrying out a desktop review of best practice with a view to rewriting its Housing Strategy to give a broad picture of the key issues for the borough.
- Homeless was one aspect of the housing Strategy and consultants were being employed to carry out a review and draft a revised Homelessness Strategy.
- The homelessness review would include the preparation of a number of two-sheet summaries setting out key facts, issues, policy and actions. Groups would be consulted on the evidence used and on their views on certain issues.
- Following the review a draft Strategy and action plan would be prepared for consultation, followed by consultation on a final draft

Strategy. The full Strategy would then be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and subsequently to Cabinet.

- The consultative process for the Homelessness Strategy was a legal requirement and would include an audit of services, resources and what could be done to meet the needs of homeless people.

Eleni Walia stated that:

- The Council was trying to co-ordinate its approach to consultation.
- The evidence base for the homelessness review would include stakeholders and residents.
- Stakeholders would be consulted through the Forum.
- Gareth Evans, Performance Officer would be emailing questionnaires to stakeholders to find out how they wished to be consulted – through the web, by post, through meetings or by other means, and on specific areas or generally.
- Council officers would be consulted in order to ensure that the questionnaires were set at an appropriate starting point.
- An equality impact assessment would ensure that any groups that were not represented on the Forum were consulted.
- Details of the consultation would be included in the next Homelessness Forum newsletter when Forum members would have an opportunity to comment.
- The Council planned to publish the revised Homelessness Strategy in July 2008.

## **6. SPEAR**

Ed Tytherleigh circulated a leaflet giving information about the work of Spear and a helpline number for rough sleepers and homeless people (Helpline: 020 8404 1481, Central Office: 020 8288 6506). Ed stated that Spear's priorities were to:

- increase temporary accommodation;
- make sure that service users are engaged in something meaningful, whether employment, training or volunteering, including social integration;
- reduce the number of office bases in order to provide a more co-ordinated service;
- extend the helpline service;
- set up a fund-raising department;
- increase use of the private rented sector.

Ed stated that Spear's key aim was to help more homeless people. Members present at the meeting were invited to leave their addresses with Ed if they wished to receive a copy of Spear's three-year strategy.

## **7. REFUGEE ACTION KINGSTON**

Kathryn Beatham reported that Refugee Action Kingston had recently extended the services of the advice worker to the Women's Friendship Group in Whitton. The Forum noted that the Whitton group would run on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and the group at Holy Trinity Church, Richmond, ran on Mondays from 12 noon to 2 p.m.

Kathryn stated that Refugee Action Kingston's services were open to asylum seekers and refugees who were new to English and that anyone who was receiving income-based benefits was entitled to ESOL sessions.

## **8. NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Forum would be held in Room 7, York House, Twickenham, on Monday 17 March 2008 from 2 to 3.30 p.m.

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The meeting ended at 3.20 p.m.