

Greater Norwich Hostel

Strategy 2007-2009



Introduction

Greater Norwich benefits from a strong and established voluntary sector in the provision of hostels and supported housing services for single homeless people.

While these organisations are in no way homogeneous, they share common aspirations and experiences for example, within the national Supporting People programme framework and through their relations with statutory housing, health and social care commissioning agents.

The providers are a diverse group of small to medium sized not-for-profit frontline service providers. They aim to offer appropriate, effective and efficient services to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. They are well linked to local networks, communities and understand the needs and aspirations of service users. The providers are able to address 'supply and service gaps' with speed, flexibility and innovation and all work across multiple services, agencies and locations. They make a critical contribution to the Greater Norwich Sub Region, serving as a safety net in the support to and advocacy of, individuals and communities at disadvantage. They make an invaluable contribution to reducing rates of single homelessness.

In 2005, a review of the hostels in Greater Norwich was started by Norwich City Council and Norfolk Supporting People. The review culminated in the publication of a consultation report in September 2006.

The review made 10 key recommendations. This strategy addresses points made in response to the consultation report and translates the recommendations into strategic aims and objectives.

Background

In late 2004 Norwich City Council and the Supporting People Team identified some areas for improvement about hostel provision in the city. It was decided that a joint review should be carried out with the sub-regional housing partners of Broadland District and South Norfolk Councils.

The lengthy review resulted in a consultation document being published in September 2006 which set out the findings and the following recommendations:

1. Produce a Single Homeless Hostel Strategy
2. Modernisation of drug and alcohol policies
3. Improved information about services
4. Common application and risk assessment forms
5. Review of hostel eligibility criteria
6. Introduce a Central Gateway Hostel Access Service
7. Increased service user involvement
8. Increased use of the private sector for move-on accommodation
9. Integrated Resettlement Team
10. Remodelling of existing services and new developments

The report included recommendations that were universally accepted by hostel providers, such as the need for a strategy and common application forms. It also included recommendations which were challenging and created genuine and valid concerns within the sector.

Concerns were also raised that some of the findings did not accurately reflect the current situation within the sector. This was largely due to the length of time taken to complete the review and publish the findings. During the review, many organisations had moved forward with issues such as drug and alcohol policies. Some of this change has been driven by Supporting People Reviews of individual services which have been carried out since the original data was gathered. The need for more up to date information is reflected in the key objectives and the action plan.

Hostel providers decided to put forward a joint response to the consultation report. Overall, responses were positive about the identified direction of travel. However, concerns were raised over some of the details within various recommendations.

The distribution of hostel bed spaces

As the table below indicates, supported accommodation resources are relatively concentrated in Norwich. Some of the resources, particularly the direct access and other services operated by St Martin's, operate countywide:

Greater Norwich Housing Sub Region – SP funded Hostels and Move-on Supported Accommodation by District

District	Provider	Primary Needs Group	No of bedspaces
Broadland	House of Genesis	Offenders	7
Broadland	St Matthew Housing	Single Homeless	17
Broadland		Sub-total	24
Norwich	Orwell Housing - Hinde House	Homeless	31
Norwich	St Edmunds Society	Offenders	18
Norwich	St Martin's - direct access	Single Homeless	30
Norwich	St Martin's - group homes	Single Homeless	33
Norwich	St Matthew Housing	Single Homeless	49
Norwich	Stonham Archway	Young People	16
Norwich	Stonham Aspland Road	Young People	5
Norwich	Stonham Ripley	Single Homeless	12
Norwich	Stonham Ripley – move-on	Single Homeless	4
Norwich	Norwich YMCA	Single Homeless	84
Norwich	Norwich YMCA	Young People	6
Norwich		Sub total	288
South Norfolk	St Matthew Housing	Single Homeless	62
South Norfolk	Solo Housing – Victoria House	Single Homeless	7
South Norfolk	Stonham Wilkinson	Single Homeless	9
South Norfolk	Stonham Wilkinson – move-on	Single Homeless	8
South Norfolk		Sub total	86

Fuller details of the services provided by each organisation can be found in the consultation report.

Reasons for producing a sub-regional hostel strategy

There is an increasing expectation for housing issues to be planned and managed at a sub regional level. This was the reason why the review included services in Broadland and South Norfolk, the other two districts which make up the Greater Norwich Housing Sub Region.

The first recommendation is to produce a hostel strategy to create a structure to manage the process of change within the hostel system. As a sub regional strategy, it follows the approach taken over recent years of taking a sub regional approach to developing housing services.

This strategy covers the period of 2007 to 2009 so that it is aligned with the Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy. This period should provide sufficient time to achieve the planned objectives set out in the action plan. A strategy over a longer period would require a significant review part way through to take account of changes in the wider housing agenda.

Strategic Context

The Greater Norwich Hostel Strategy links with the following other strategies:

The Greater Norwich Sub-regional Housing Strategy 2007-10
The Greater Norwich Homelessness Strategy 2007-10
The Norfolk Housing and Support Strategy for Offenders 2006-9
The Norfolk Supporting People Strategy 2005-10

Strategic vision

The vision of the hostel strategy is to sustain, develop and improve the hostel accommodation within Greater Norwich so that access to high quality accommodation is available to all those with appropriate need, throughout the period of need. This vision has five key strategic aims:

- A. To take a strategic and integrated approach towards hostel accommodation provision
- B. To provide clear access routes into hostel accommodation
- C. To provide an adequate supply of appropriate supported accommodation within Greater Norwich
- D. To provide effective resettlement into more independent accommodation
- E. To maximise funding to support the recommendations identified in the Hostel Review

Objectives

The objectives of the Greater Norwich Hostel Strategy are based on the recommendations in the hostel review and take account of the consultation feedback that was received. They are grouped below under the appropriate strategic aim.

A - Strategic aim: <i>To take a strategic and integrated approach towards hostel accommodation provision</i>

Objectives:

- 1. Produce a strategy for hostel provision which provides a framework for implementing the agreed change within the sector.**

A clear consensus has been established that there needs to be a strategic plan for improving the hostel provision in Greater Norwich and to make sure that it is aligned with the wider housing agenda.

The accompanying action plan sets out a detailed timetable for achieving each of the objectives in the strategy.

- 2. Produce an action plan that identifies options, timescales and resources to implement the change identified in the strategy.**

The action plan sets out the detail of how the strategy is to be achieved. The action plan has been developed based on current knowledge and reasonable assumptions of future change. The action plan will be reviewed after the first year and updated to take account of performance to date and changes in the wider housing arena.

3. Review the action plan after one year.

The action plan will be reviewed at the end of the first year to take stock of changes and performance to date.

4. Report widely and regularly on the performance against the action plan.

Regular performance reports will be made available to the following groups:

- Supporting People Core Strategy Group
- GNHP directors Group
- Greater Norwich Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group
- Youth Homelessness Forum
- Norfolk Offender Accommodation Forum
- Norfolk Drug and Alcohol Partnership

B - Strategic aim: *To provide clear access routes into hostel accommodation*

5. Create a coherent sub-regional approach to drug and alcohol policies.

It is accepted that there has been improvement in this area since the start of this review. However, there is still work to be done by some organisations.

The Training and Workforce Development Officer at the Norfolk DAAT is currently carrying out training 'audits' for providers, and will produce a report on gaps and strengths in respect of training within this sector.

6. Agree and implement a common approach to drug and alcohol policies where necessary

Any significant review of drug and alcohol policies will need to be supported with training for staff. This will need to be appropriately resourced.

7. Provide greater access to information about the availability of accommodation and services through either a 24-hour telephone line or internet access depending on available resources.

We would like to examine with providers the way that service information is communicated to the full range of prospective service users and referring agencies. St Martins Housing Trust is currently developing a 24-hour telephone information service.

Norfolk made a bid for funding from the Digital Challenge. Although this was not the winning bid, there is a possibility of some funding being available. If available, this may fund the expansion of a telephone service to include an internet service. Other options for funding may need to be explored if the Digital Challenge funding is insufficient.

Links need to be made to the NOAF Offenders Strategy which has a stated action to produce and distribute information about housing and support services in Norfolk.

8. Produce a common core application and risk assessment form to ease the application process for individuals.

This is a key element in simplification of the process for both potential residents and supporting agencies. This was recognised during the consultation period, with all respondents in support of standard forms or, at least, standard core forms with additional information provided for specific hostels.

The Norfolk DAAT is currently reviewing Models of Care, which includes common risk assessment forms for use within drug and alcohol treatment services. Work is also underway with Norfolk Probation Area to establish a risk assessment form to support housing applications from High-Risk offenders. These two pieces of work may form a useful starting point to develop core forms for hostel referrals.

With work in progress and both the Norfolk Drug and Alcohol Partnership and Norfolk Probation Area working countywide, there is the opportunity to create a Norfolk-wide risk assessment form that can be used by accommodation and housing-related support providers, substance misuse services and Probation. Standardisation should increase the quality of information and, therefore, improve the quality of risk assessments.

9. Review the eligibility criteria used by hostels to ensure that all those with support needs are appropriately accommodated, and those who do not have relevant support needs are accommodated in other ways.

It is important that the valuable resource of hostel bed spaces is used in the best possible way. This will allow those in need to access appropriate hostel accommodation, while alternative options are explored for those who require a less supportive environment. Appropriate use of hostel provision and referral to other intervention services is vital to maintaining a healthy turnover of bed spaces and ensuring availability for people requiring hostel accommodation.

Eligibility criteria need to be transparent so that individuals and referring agencies can avoid making unnecessary approaches that will not succeed. Acceptance criteria within the sector needs to be as inclusive as possible to ensure that all applicants can be accommodated somewhere in the sector, while still providing specific services dedicated to particular client groups.

10. Investigate the feasibility of establishing a Central Gateway Hostel Access Service.

There was general support for a Gateway scheme into hostels. However, there were concerns raised about who would run the scheme, the loss of control over allocations, the scope of the services provided and how these would be funded.

The various options for a Gateway Service need to be critically analysed to establish the most effective and realistic model for Greater Norwich. This analysis will need to take account of best practice, existing provision in Greater Norwich and current and future funding possibilities. Through an open appraisal process, it is hoped that wide acceptance will be gained for a Gateway scheme to be established.

11. Develop a Central Gateway Hostel Access Service if it is determined to be feasible.

One of the key determining factors in establishing a Gateway Service will be the funding opportunities that can be identified and accessed.

C - Strategic aim: <i>To provide an adequate supply of appropriate supported accommodation within Greater Norwich</i>
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12. Review the rules and exclusion policies of hostel providers to ensure that there is a coherent sub-regional approach for the benefit of both staff and residents.

A review of exclusion policies was undertaken as part of the hostel review. This identified a lack of clarity in some of these policies that could lead to confusion and the possibility of unnecessary evictions. The review did not identify any occasions where inappropriate evictions had taken place.

Any further work in this area needs to take account of changes that may have been made to policies since the start of the review.

13. Investigate the extent to which remodelling and new development is required, particularly to ensure that there is:

- i) emergency supported accommodation services for young people aged 16-21**

- ii) **adequate access within existing services for people who drink or continue to use illicit substances**
- iii) **higher support services for people with entrenched patterns of drug and alcohol use.**
- iv) **adequate service provision for people with challenging behaviour and/or a history of serious offending (i.e. a history of exclusion from hostel services or convictions for serious crimes)**

Any reconfiguration of services would need to be based on clear evidence about the requirements for change. Organisations will need considerable support to implement any agreed changes. Changes will need to be undertaken sensitively and based on a thorough assessment of need and impacts. Part of the assessment must take account of other recommendations in the hostel review particularly concerning access to move-on accommodation and finding alternatives to using hostel accommodation. If successfully achieved, both these activities will reduce pressures on hostel accommodation. This is a long term objective due to the necessary links with the other outcomes in the strategy.

14. Investigate different hostel services around the country and locally that can work effectively with individuals and allow them to stabilise their problems.

The GNHP Tackling Homelessness More Effectively Sub Group to carry out research and produce a specification for new specialist hostel provision that can be submitted in future capital and revenue funding bidding rounds to meet these needs.

This work can be carried out at two levels with a general gathering of information about various service models as the first stage. This will allow faster development of appropriate schemes suitable for bidding rounds once a clear need has been established.

15. Embed mechanisms and strategies to involve service users in everyday practice.

Few comments were received during the consultation period concerning the involvement of service users. However, those that were received were supportive of increased service user involvement.

Service users at Hinde House identified limits in their aspirations to be involved in long term planning due to the short term nature of their accommodation. It is important that realistic expectations are established for service user involvement and that resources are made available to build the required capacity within each organisation.

D - Strategic aim: *To provide effective resettlement into more independent accommodation*

16. Carry out a feasibility study to establish the best method to improve resettlement and tenancy sustainment.

Concerns were raised by providers over the way this recommendation would be implemented so that it added to rather than detracted from the current work on resettlement. It is during the feasibility study that the best method of enhancing resettlement work will be established.

This is seen as a longer term objective within the action plan.

17. Implement feasibility study findings.

There are a number of other objectives within the strategy that would logically need to be implemented before changes to resettlement.

18. Develop increased use of the private rented sector as a means of accessing move-on accommodation.

A number of concerns were raised over access to, and the security and quality of private rented accommodation. These are all valid concerns. However, the increasing pressure on social housing means that the private sector must be investigated.

Although challenging, this is a critical objective to generate more move on accommodation and reduce the effects of 'silting up' within all hostels. A considerable amount of work will be required to build confidence with private landlords and manage the expectation of residents.

E - Strategic aim: *To maximise funding to support the recommendations identified in the Hostel Review*

19. Explore and exploit all funding opportunities and secure additional funding where possible to allow the strategic development of hostel provision.

Commitments have been made by Norwich City Council and Supporting People that staff time will be made available to implement the changes that have been identified. Norwich City Council has also committed resources from the Council's General Fund to provide funding to Space East to develop specific aspects of the strategy.

However, further funding will be needed to build the capacity required to deliver this strategy. Although the Department for Communities and Local Government and Supporting People have traditionally been the major sources of funding for homelessness work, there is a need to be more

creative in identifying additional funding streams such as Digital Challenge and health.