

Addressing worklessness with social housing tenants through targeted outreach

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Worklessness is a real buzz word at the moment, and social landlords are under pressure to tackle it by working in partnership with other agencies. This briefing paper describes why it is such an important issue for social landlords, and shows how Unity Housing Association has addressed it by developing the Tenants Into Work (TIW) model of partnership working and outreach.

2 Key points

- The Hills Report (*Ends and Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England*, John Hills, February 2007) highlighted the need for social landlords to address the high incidence of worklessness on their estates
- The government has stated clearly that it expects social landlords to work in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions and other agencies to tackle worklessness, and that this approach should be the norm
- The National Housing Federation has been encouraging New Deal contractors to form direct links with housing associations, who can access the New Deal funding as sub-contractors delivering services aimed at tackling worklessness.

3 Background

- 3.1 In February 2007, the government published the Hills Report on the future of social housing. Hills identified worklessness as a major theme, stating that the proportion of employed social housing tenants had “collapsed amongst social tenants in the last quarter century, with fewer than half of social tenants of working age in employment in 2006, and only 35% in full-time paid work”.
- 3.2 Hills also stated that “the characteristics of (social housing) tenants have also changed... high rates of disability or long-term sickness, lone parenthood, and of people from a minority ethnic background, for instance.” However, when compared with equivalent households living in other tenures (eg, private rented), social housing tenants were far more likely to be workless.
- 3.3 The Jobcentre defines worklessness as “a less familiar term than unemployment and extends beyond the unemployed. It includes those who are economically inactive, that is those who are of working age not in:
 - Work
 - Full-time education or training

- Not actively seeking work.”

3.4 Hills found that according to 2006 data, out of 9.1m people classified as workless, nearly a third were social housing tenants. Social landlords already have links with these people and it is these links that make them such attractive partners to agencies working in the training and employment sector.

4 The Tenants Into Work (TIW) project

4.1 TIW was set up by Unity Housing Association in partnership with the Jobs and Skills department of Leeds City Council (LCC). It was part of the ‘Job Zone’, a Neighbourhood Renewal Fund project, and was originally funded from June 2007 to March 2008. However, due to the success of the model, funding has been continued until at least March 2009.

4.2 The Job Zone partnership was co-ordinated by Leeds charity Learning Partnerships, and provided funding for targeted work to tackle worklessness in the areas in Leeds which were in the top 10% of deprived SOAs nationally.

4.3 The TIW project was created to complement the work done by the eight employment and training agencies within the Job Zone. They had found it difficult to engage with social landlords, because:

- They didn’t know which social landlords had stock in the areas in which they operated
- They didn’t know who to contact about worklessness issues, and found it too time-consuming trying to get hold of the right person
- They had unrealistic expectations about how quickly social landlords could react and pass information on to their tenants.

4.4 Unity was brought in as a partner because its two arms – Unity Housing and Unity Enterprise – formed a natural link between the housing, and employment and training, sectors. Unity Housing manages around 1,000 properties across Leeds. Unity Enterprise is its regeneration arm, providing affordable business units for local and community organisations. Unity is also a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) housing association.

4.5 LCC’s Jobs and Skills department has a network of community Jobshops, based in deprived areas across the city. They aim to provide a drop-in service for local people to access information, advice and guidance service. They also provide practical resources such as help with internet job searches, CVs and application forms. The Jobshop serving the Chapeltown area of Leeds is housed in one of Unity’s business centres.

5 Outreach work

- 5.1 TIW was set up to help social landlords to develop a structured approach to tackle worklessness amongst their tenants. It was originally envisaged that this could take the form of websites, tenant newsletters and open days at events. However, Unity Housing staff had previously found that the client group they were interested in were unlikely to respond to this kind of approach. The project decided to go directly out to tenants and visit them at home.
- 5.2 The outreach work originally focussed on social housing tenants in the most deprived area of the city in terms of worklessness – the Granges area of Chapeltown – and surrounding neighbourhoods in Chapeltown & Harehills that were in the top 10% of deprived SOAs. The area is also one of the most ethnically diverse in the city.
- 5.3 The six main social landlords operating in the target area were asked to provide a list of addresses with the over-65s filtered out, to prevent disturbing elderly residents unnecessarily. Different organisations had different approaches to data protection, but it was agreed that providing a list of addresses only was not in contravention of the Data Protection Act. The resulting list contained over 1,100 addresses.
- 5.4 Some landlords raised concerns that calling on tenants uninvited could possibly contravene their rights under the Human Rights Act. TIW adopted a different notification method for different social landlords, depending on their wishes. Some were cold-called, some were sent a letter on their landlord's headed notepaper, and some were sent colourful postcards about the project.
- 5.5 The outreach work was done by one of the Jobshop staff, working with Unity staff. They chatted to tenants informally, finding out what their situation was and where they wanted to be in the medium and long term. Once they had done this, they filled in a short questionnaire and referral form.
- 5.6 TIW had to make referrals to other Job Zone partners, but also agreed to refer on to other projects, to provide a wide range of options for tenants and prevent duplication of effort. TIW also sought to find out more about tenants' needs, and what they wanted from their landlords, using a specially designed questionnaire.
- 5.7 Out of the 1,100 addresses, *TIW* had the following outcomes:
- 171 referrals to other Job Zone partners for support or training – 88% were BME and 55% were female
 - 127 tenants agreed to be interviewed and complete a TIW questionnaire – 89% were BME, 77% were workless and 23% were in work.

- 5.8 It wasn't possible to track all of the referrals, but the range of outcomes is shown by the 67 TIW clients that one LCC Jobs and Skills worker saw at the Chapeltown Jobshop:
- 35 successful job outcomes
 - 18 participants on a confidence-raising course
 - Seven participants on a PATH information session (for BME unemployed)
 - 16 training or voluntary work placements.
- 5.9 As a result of the success of the Chapeltown pilot, the LCC Jobs and Skills service expanded its outreach work to other parts of the city. They identified areas where their community Jobshops were being under-used, and TIW approached the relevant social landlords to find out where their tenants were.
- 5.10 One of the Leeds ALMOs has used the TIW model by seconding a worker from Jobcentre Plus for a year. It is using the outreach element of the project, but not the co-ordination role.
- 5.11 The TIW project is now working with social landlords to target specific estates across Leeds. The project has attracted £3,000 in A4E regional funding through Places for People, to be used to pay for outreach to social housing tenants across Leeds in 2008/09. Trained Jobs and Skills workers will do outreach work alongside social housing staff and/or residents' association members, and this is followed up with a local event with stalls from employment and training agencies.

6 Co-ordination role

- 6.1 TIW set up an email network of social landlord contacts throughout Leeds and acted as a focal point to which employment and training agencies could send information to for dissemination.
- 6.2 TIW had found that there was a wide range of different agencies which wanted to work with social housing providers, but social landlords' knowledge of these agencies was patchy. The project put together a series of attractive newsheets covering different aspects of worklessness in Leeds – eg, the Council's Jobshops, mental health, BME communities, youth – and suggested ways that social landlords could work with the featured agencies.
- 6.3 The project also held a networking event in April 2008, which brought social landlords together with potential partners who worked in employment and training. After feeding back on the project's outreach work and findings, the event used a 'speed-dating' format to encourage people from the different sectors to interact and produce ideas for joint working.

7 Findings

- 7.1 As a rule of thumb, for every 10 properties, four would answer the door and one would want to be referred on for help with employment or training.
- 7.2 The outreach work was key to reaching the ‘hard to reach’. Many tenants really wanted to get back into work, but were stuck in a rut. These people were not going to respond to any flyer that came through their door, or an advert in a newsletter. They needed a lot of support and empathy to get them to walk through the door of an official agency.
- 7.3 Personal contact was key to engaging with tenants. Outreach workers had to have a really good knowledge of their area and of all the different help available locally. Residents were generally unwilling to travel far to access training, and referrals had to be finely tailored to suit the individual. Practical help, such as advice on producing a CV, filling in application forms or help with internet job searches, were particularly popular.
- 7.4 Referring tenants to other agencies was rarely successful unless the outreach staff acted as introductory agents. Residents were far more likely to go on to access support with training and employment if they got to know the outreach worker, and could make an appointment to visit the same person back where they worked.
- 7.5 Residents had low levels of awareness about local projects that could help them. They were more likely to report having heard about something through word of mouth, rather than by having read about it. When turning up to an appointment, many residents brought a friend or relative for support, or came back with someone afterwards. One referral could create a chain of future customers.
- 7.6 In some areas, residents were generally friendly and welcoming. However, in others, outreach was more difficult, with staff reporting that ‘they won’t open their doors to you’. In these areas, a trusted local intermediary (eg, a well-known housing officer or resident) is key to success.
- 7.7 This approach was especially effective with BME tenants. Those with poor English skills could generally talk about their needs if they were listened to patiently, and really benefited from practical help with IT and forms.
- 7.8 There was a big demand for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses, but there were few places available locally. This is a gap in training courses that social landlords could consider filling, especially as it also addresses the social cohesion agenda.
- 7.9 Letters proved to be an expensive and ineffective method of communication. Out of over 400 tenants sent letters about TIW, only two responded – one to ask not to be cold-called. The best response rate to written communication was to postcards with

a picture of a member of staff who was well known to tenants – three out of 40 responded to arrange appointments.

- 7.10 Social landlords were often as ‘hard to reach’ for employment and training agencies as their tenants. TIW’s role as a central focal point made it easier for the two sides to communicate.
- 7.11 Very few tenants identified themselves as needing help with managing their finances, and no one was interested in any training to help them do so better. This indicates that attempts to get tenants to attend pre-emptive voluntary programmes or education will have little success – most tenants don’t think it applies to them. Good quality, empathetic help and benefits advice at the point where a tenant starts falling into arrears are more likely to be effective.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 Many social landlords are aware that they should be doing something about the worklessness agenda, but are not sure where to start. The TIW model uses available resources from the employment and training sectors to directly target social housing tenants.
- 8.2 Where one social landlord is interested in acting as a focal point for co-ordinating worklessness and can show that they are effective in this role, they can attract funding from other sources. Other social landlords are also likely to be willing to buy into this kind of project.
- 8.3 To avoid impacting on income collection, worklessness outreach has to be linked with effective low-level arrears control and benefits advice.

9 Recommended resources

- 9.1 The following reports are recommended:
- *Social housing and worklessness: Key policy messages*, Department for Work and Pensions, research report no. 482, 2008
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2007-2008/rrep482.pdf>
 - *What tenants want: community, worklessness and the role of associations*, CRMI Insights bulletin no. 2, Housing Corporation Centre for Research and Market Intelligence, Spring 2008
http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/upload/pdf/J6709_CRMIspring08_AW02_LR_FINAL.pdf

- *Housing associations tackling worklessness*, the National Affordable Homes Agency/The Housing Corporation, November 2007
<http://www.housingcorp.gov.uk/server/show/ConWebDoc.12899/changeNav/440>
- *What works with tackling worklessness?*, London Development Agency, 2006
http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/economic_unit/docs/worklessness.pdf

9.2 Unity Housing Association has also produced a longer report on *Tenants Into Work* and has a TIW outreach model, available on request from emma.ruane@unityha.co.uk

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