NEHTT Research into Practice Seminar
Thursday December 15th 2016

Setting up Temporary Accommodation Boards:
Improving Lives in B&Bs and Private Hostels

This seminar was attended by representatives of housing and homelessness agencies, Environmental Health, Fire & Rescue Services, the Police, and Probation agencies from across the North East. It brought to light 3 pieces of research and then focussed on collective action which can improve the lives of people living in this forgotten sector.

The event also involved presentations about the approach and actions of 2 local authorities in the NE.

Slides used at the event can be accessed from the NEHTT webpage for the event here.

The Journey Home
Christa Maciver from Justlife summarised research findings from a 3 year research project carried out with IPPR North. The latest report can be read here.

There were 3 key messages from the research:

Hidden – it’s a largely hidden sector: we don’t know how many people live in it; there is no record of who lives in it, in most areas; it has lots of different names; and people are placed there even when they don’t want to be or when agencies are asked not to place people in particular buildings.

Bleak – living conditions and the way it is managed can be very poor; people may be bullied by unscrupulous or uncaring staff; it’s very hard for residents to complain about the conditions; people feel they have little or no control over their lives in this type of accommodation; people may live there for a long time; and there are high numbers of deaths recorded.

Change – things are changing, and it can change.
The Justlife / IPPR N research led to 4 main recommendations:

1. **Temporary Accommodation Boards**: involve all relevant local agencies, and people with experience of living in UTAs, to work together to develop actions for changing the situation in each area.

2. **Greenlist and exclusion list**: identify how people find out about the accommodation, and what each place is like; produce a list of good places and those which definitely should not receive referrals; develop effective signposting to the better places and good information so that potential residents can be better informed.

3. **Minimum set of standards**: develop a set of minimum and consistent standards, below which people should not be expected to live with; develop a model set of rules, rights, and licence / tenancy agreements; identify named contact points so that residents can seek advice and make complaints (anonymously if necessary).

4. **Proper in-tenancy support**: provide support at the point of placement and when people move in, so that people can manage their stay, and meet their needs whilst they are living there; provide information about how people can move on; accompany people when they move in.

_Ruth Cox from Justlife_ described the progress made in setting up a pilot TAB in Manchester. The pilot has been developed alongside a Homelessness Charter for Manchester ([https://charter.streetsupport.net/](https://charter.streetsupport.net/)).

Improving conditions in “Substandard Temporary Accommodation” is being tackled by one of the Charter’s Action Groups. It is very important that people with experience of the sector work with people from all the agencies to co-produce the solutions needed. So far, 15 different services have come together, and more are to be invited to join in.

Short term aims are to influence owners and managers so that conditions start to improve, including the quality of food provided, and to reduce bullying and access allowed to loan sharks. Longer term aims are to help people to get access to services which can help with multiple and complex needs, and increase the likelihood that proprietors are held to account for their actions.

_Sheila Spencer_ summarised the learning from the North East Regional Homelessness Group’s research published in 2013 (the report can be read [here](#)). Key points to come out of this research included the following:

- There were around 114 B&Bs and 14 private hostels in the region at that time
- There was considerable range in numbers of establishments in any LA area, and in numbers of beds per establishment
• There were concerns about management and physical conditions, safeguarding and knowing who was living in each place, how long people had lived there, and how conditions could be improved

The research had led to two projects which were discussed later in the seminar.

Adele Irving from Northumbria University summarised her research which was reported in 2015, **Housing as a Means, Not an End: The Health and Wellbeing of HMO Residents in Newcastle 2011-2015** (report can be read [here](#)). Key findings in this research were:

• Residents tended to have few options at the time they entered unsupported temporary accommodation, so it was often a last resort
• Many were self-referrals but a wide range of agencies also referred people to this type of accommodation
• Many were vulnerable with a range of problems in addition to homelessness, but may not be accessing services to get help with those problems
• Physical conditions were often poor, though properties passed minimum standards
• However, there was a greater impact on residents' wellbeing from isolation, the level of noise, violent atmospheres, lack of privacy, and lack of control and hope that residents often experienced

**Examples of local authority action**

**Christine Oates from Sunderland City Council** described her authority’s work on improving living conditions for people in the small and large private hostels in the city (a total of 164 beds in 6 hostels). Key points were:

• A Hostel Strategy Group involves key agencies as well as lead councillors, and more recently hostel proprietors, health teams, and homelessness agencies, and has developed a vision for the hostels
• A pilot scheme introduced new licence conditions including a requirement to report safeguarding issues, and undertake training in safeguarding, and a good practice guide
• A dedicated Environmental Health Officer working with hostel managers and staff has made considerable impact and has been funded for a further 2 years
• She meets with hostel managers and owners regularly in a solution-focused meeting
• This work has improved knowledge of who is staying where and their health needs, has led to help for residents to manage their finances (which has reduced financial exploitation), and has led to referrals for care packages and successful moves into sheltered and independent accommodation

**Julie Lathan from Stockton Borough Council** spoke about the way that Public Health funding had been used to work with one proprietor owning a large hostel in Stockton. This work has involved:
• A worker based within the hostel
• A successful though still challenging partnership with the proprietor
• Training for staff on safeguarding, how to tackle anti-social behaviour, and working with the Police and other agencies to reduce the harm from drugs and alcohol
• All referrals going through the worker so that their background and risks associated with them are known about
• Identifying needs, and developing a pathway into more suitable, long term housing with support as needed
• Void loss built into Housing Benefit rates

Panel session
Each table identified a question to ask the panel of speakers. The questions included:

1. How had isolation of vulnerable individuals been tackled?
2. How could the momentum be continued?
3. How easy had it been to engage Adult Safeguarding teams?
4. Had the fact that people were referred into the accommodation from outside the LA area made it more difficult to work with and get buy-in from agencies involved with residents?
5. Whose money is being saved through these initiatives?
6. What level of staff need to be engaged in Temporary Accommodation Boards?

Identifying actions for the future in the North East

6 tables identified actions as follows:

- **North Tyneside** – build on MEAM (multiple needs) work already happening – involving people with lived experience
- **South Tyneside** – build on an existing group – piloting a TAB (to fit in with how we already work)
- **Sunderland** – involve people with lived experience – read across within strategy groups
- **Tees Valley / Durham** – Tackle barriers: people who don’t buy in to this: probation, CCG, mental health services – might consider a region-wide approach
- **Northumberland / Newcastle / Gateshead** – engage local authority in the process: what do we do if they aren’t involved – Justlife to broker conversation with councillors/political leaders?
- **Regional** – Develop referral routes

In order to make this work, the following were identified as actions in some or all areas of the North East:

- Involve mental health trusts
• Involve CCG – tell them how much will be saved and how much time it would save
• Involve Community Safety – already a multi-agency partnership and reporting mechanism
• Provide a picture of what is happening e.g. health needs, crime stats, costs, staff time – and agree the data set needed
• Information sharing agreement to be agreed with all agencies, ideally to share information on move-in as well as later – need a Police-force-wide policy
• Involve EHO regional group – discussion about whether this is a statutory duty
• Involve people with lived experience – would be easy to do in the NE

Justlife offered their time and expertise to help to set up a Temporary Accommodation Board in the NE.