



*Providing Housing and Support*  
*Lessons and Good Practice*

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School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol

January 2007  
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Any errors of fact or interpretation should be attributed to the authors alone.

On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government

Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London  
SW1E 5DU  
Telephone: 020 7944 4400  
Website: [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background and purpose

In October 2002 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, now Communities and Local Government, commissioned a research team from the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, to evaluate the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund (SCSHF) and the pilots for teenage mothers funded through the 2000/2001 round of the Approved Development Programme (ADP). The ADP pilots focused upon accommodation-based support, but the SCSHF supported both accommodation-based and floating support schemes for young people at risk; victims of domestic violence; offenders and those at risk of offending; and people with drug and alcohol problems.

Schemes funded under the SCSHF and the ADP were expected to produce the following outcomes: maintaining a successful independent tenancy; participation in education, training or employment; reducing offending (or re-offending) behaviour or instances of being a victim of crime; and reducing drug and alcohol misuse. For teenage mothers additional outcomes were the avoidance of further unplanned pregnancies and the adoption of a healthy lifestyle for mothers and children.

This guide draws on the evaluation to discuss key lessons from the experience of developing and initially operating the schemes and to highlight aspects of good practice. It encompasses both accommodation-based and floating support schemes. Separate reports present the results of the evaluation as a whole, and the good practice lessons drawn from the provision of accommodation-based support to teenage mothers through the ADP pilots.<sup>1</sup>

## Developing schemes

- Housing and support provision at a local level should be developed strategically.
- Local areas need accessible housing and support to address different levels of need. Meeting very different levels of need is often not possible within a single scheme. Mixing users with very different lifestyles and needs in a single accommodation-based scheme should be treated with caution. Hence a range of provision is required.
- To maximise effectiveness it is desirable to use support provision flexibly, including scope for service users to return temporarily to higher levels of support in order to cope with particular issues or adverse events.

<sup>1</sup> *Providing Housing and Support: An Evaluation of the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund and the Approved Development Programme Pilots for Teenage Mothers*, Communities and Local Government, 2007. *ADP Pilots for Teenage Mothers: Lessons and Good Practice*, Communities and Local Government, 2007.

- The *concentration* and *dispersion* of schemes should be considered during planning. This can impact upon the extent to which vulnerable service users can integrate into a community.
- Dialogue with the community, from early in the planning process through to operation, can be vital for the successful development of a scheme.
- The nature and level of support needed by each service user to make the transition to independent living varies. Some require a range of support inputs over an extended period. For others, a relatively modest amount of support at the appropriate time can suffice. The needs of some users are such that independent living will always require some support.

## The location and design of accommodation-based schemes

- An inappropriate location can significantly affect the popularity of a scheme and the quality of life of its residents.
- Scheme location needs to be planned in relation to access to the relevant complementary services.
- It is vital to consider how residents will use a scheme and how they will draw support from external providers of formal and informal support. Location in relation to transport routes and distance from support networks are critical issues.
- Providing a safe and stable environment within which users can rebuild their lives and begin to think about the future is fundamental.
- Scheme design should be informed from the outset by the proposed model of support. It needs to strike the balance between independence and supervision, and between fostering independence and encouraging peer support, consciously and with care.
- Scheme design must be informed by a strong awareness of the needs of users and achieve acceptable standards of provision, particularly in terms of space. The alternative is a scheme that struggles to fill its vacancies.
- The physical design of the scheme should minimize the possibility of residents feeling they are treated inequitably e.g. in their access to space.

## The contribution of joint working

- Successful joint working arrangements at both strategic and operational level are vital to meeting the needs of vulnerable people with complex needs. Joint working is facilitated by a sense of shared, on-going commitment to assisting service users.

- Networking plays a range of important strategic and operational roles in scheme activities, but available resources may impose limits on inter-agency networking.
- Ongoing active support for a scheme from key local stakeholders can be strategically and symbolically important in reinforcing its value in meeting local needs.
- Communication with all stakeholders should be ongoing, rather than just when there are problems or when changes are planned.
- Informal relationships are often central to service delivery in the early months of operation, but as a service develops more formal agreements can be important in ensuring continuity of service and clarity of roles.
- Successful collaborative working relies on clear lines of communication and allocation of responsibility between partner agencies.
- Initial joint planning when individual service users join a scheme should be followed by monthly contact with referring agencies, where appropriate, in negotiation with the service user. This reduces the risk of referring agencies disengaging, allows the scheme to build effectively on previous work and increases continuity of support.
- A flexible approach to sharing information between agencies working jointly can maximise effectiveness, but it requires clear understanding of consent, confidentiality, and data protection.

## Accessing schemes, assessing applicants

- Schemes benefit from a clear vision of the service user profile that will mesh with the model of support they are proposing. This can assist in managing the flow of referrals.
- Clarity over the referral process is essential – referring agencies must understand the types of user and the level of need that a scheme is designed to support.
- A well-functioning application process is vital. Managing and clarifying expectations through good communication is fundamental. Residents must be very clear about the need to engage with the model of support operated by a scheme.
- Initial needs assessments may not always highlight the full extent of the service users' needs. Formal monitoring should be complemented by a qualitative understanding of service users' needs. Ongoing keyworking processes should recognise the gradual nature of disclosure.

## Providing support

- High quality, committed and skilled staff are at the heart of all successful and effective support provision.
- Valuing the user as a person is fundamental: it is the foundation upon which confidence and self-esteem can be built.
- The journey to independence is not always a smooth progression in one direction. Support mechanisms need to respond flexibly to a user's changing needs and recognise that users may experience setbacks that mean a higher level of support is temporarily needed.
- Residents move toward independence at their own rate, relative to their needs: workers must be able and willing to facilitate their move forward.
- There can be a gap between *providing* and *accepting* support. Service user engagement is important for maximising the positive outcomes from the support process.
- Attention needs to be paid to how intrusive users perceive a support system to be. This can be a key factor in determining whether support is taken up: systems perceived to be overly intrusive can meet with resistance.
- The financial status of users can impede effectiveness. The poverty faced by some users can undermine efforts to instil faith in the system and encourage them to engage in other activities such as training.

### **KEYWORKING AND INFORMAL SUPPORT IN ACCOMMODATION-BASED SCHEMES**

- The dominant practice is to structure support around keyworking, but the degree of formality in keyworking processes can vary. Sensitivity to the appropriate tone for such meetings can be important for maximising participation.
- Good keyworking practice comprises regular sessions that are enforced as an expected part of a tenancy, with the content being specific, relevant and negotiated with the resident.
- Keyworking sessions alone are unlikely to address all users' personal and emotional issues. Formal sessions need to be seen as part of a structure of support that also includes informal contact which responds to need as it arises.

## PEER SUPPORT AND GROUP LIVING IN ACCOMMODATION-BASED SCHEMES

- Peer support can be a valuable element of an overall model of support. Schemes need to be clear on where they strike the balance between formal support, informal support, peer support, and encouraging independence.
- Peer influence is not always positive. In drug and alcohol schemes, in particular, there is the possibility of negative influence if a member relapses.
- The *complexity* as well as the *value* of living in a group needs to be recognized.

## EXTERNAL SUPPORT TO RESIDENTS OF ACCOMMODATION-BASED SCHEMES

- Facilitating users in developing positive informal support networks is vital. These networks supplement the support received from a scheme, and the user will draw upon them once they move on. Yet, schemes do not always value and nurture these networks.
- Some service users may have deliberately cut themselves off from previous informal networks. Schemes need the resources to enable new networks to be built where necessary.

## A SENSE OF HOME

- Creating a sense of security and a feeling of belonging among the residents can further the scheme's objectives, even though residents realise they are living there temporarily.
- The ethos, design and operation of the scheme should all facilitate and reinforce respect for the fact that it is the service users' home, typically for a year or more.
- Two particular factors affect residents' sense of home: first, well-intentioned rules that residents perceive as oppressive; and, second, staff who, often inadvertently, do not respect the scheme space as the residents' home.

## SUPPORT WITH RETURNING TO EDUCATION, TRAINING OR EMPLOYMENT

- Moves towards engagement in education or employment should be at a speed appropriate to each resident. Creative ways back into informal education can be needed for people whose educational experience and aspirations may have been disrupted.

- For those with particularly chaotic lives, providing regular meaningful daytime activity that does not necessarily have the character of 'work' can be a first step in providing some stability, structure and 'occupation'.

## The transition to independent living

- Shortages of appropriate local social rented tenancies for move-on accommodation create difficulties for, and undermine the effectiveness of, accommodation-based schemes. Users frequently remain in schemes longer than their support needs warrant.
- The process for accessing move-on accommodation needs careful thought in order to provide a co-ordinated service delivering smooth and timely moves into suitable, more independent tenancies. Not being able to ensure such moves can begin to undermine the work schemes have done to build independence.
- The nature of the property offered as move-on accommodation can influence the chances of the service user making a success of living independently.
- Many residents leave accommodation-based schemes with on-going support needs. Co-ordination between service providers is likely to be needed to ensure that appropriate support is available at the new location.
- Maintaining informal links with a scheme after moving on offers the possibility of the scheme being used as a valuable resource on an 'as needed' basis by ex-residents.

## Providing floating support

- Effective floating support is based on a relationship of mutual respect. Staff require a complex range of skills and the ability to balance competing demands. Sensitivity to the social dynamics of the support relationship is vital.
- Thorough risk assessment is particularly important for floating support because workers may be putting themselves at greater personal risk by providing support outside of an office or managed residential environment.
- Taking account of the financial and time costs of travel is important in planning a floating support scheme, particularly in rural areas.
- It is good practice to draw up a written contract or agreement with each service user when they start receiving floating support. Contracts are then followed by the development of action plans or care plans and users tend to understand these better and appreciate them.

## ENDING THE SUPPORT RELATIONSHIP

- The issue of ending the support relationship must be introduced sensitively, but it is important to be clear to users that their support is temporary.
- Support workers need an accurate assessment of a user's capacity to live independently and to encourage and challenge them to take the next step when the time is right. Workers also need to be able to 'let go' of the relationship.
- For some people independent living is only possible via the ongoing provision of floating support services. For most, floating support is typically tapered off before being withdrawn. This process needs to be sufficiently flexible to allow support to be temporarily increased to cope with specific adverse events or crises.
- The process of tapering support needs to be communicated clearly to the service user, who needs to be comfortable with what is happening. The alternative is to risk users feeling abandoned or cast adrift.
- Making sure that there is help or low level support a user can draw on, should the need arise, after the formal support relationship has ended provides reassurance and can make a substantial contribution to users being able to live independently.

## Operational issues affecting both accommodation-based and floating support schemes

- All newly established services evolve over time. Provision should be evaluated regularly in order to maximise effectiveness and lessons learnt. Schemes need effective formal and informal mechanisms for evaluating performance. Learning is best achieved through a mix of formal periodic review and continuous reflection on experience.
- Self-evaluation is particularly significant for schemes in the early months, but when operating in a constantly changing environment the process of learning never stops.
- Consultation with users and stakeholders and receiving, and taking account of, more informal feedback on services enables adjustments to ensure that users' needs are being met effectively. Clear mechanisms for gathering user views on the service are particularly important to floating support services because there are fewer opportunities to interact with staff outside the formal keyworking sessions.
- A stable organisational environment, or one in which change is handled with care, assists successful operation. Organisational restructuring can interfere with service delivery.

- Effective systems to support staff to handle the demands of support work will assist in promoting staff well-being and retention, which in turn enhances the effectiveness of support provision. This can be particularly important for floating support workers, who run a greater risk of being isolated.
- Effective working requires that workers have sufficient time for training, updating and networking. This has implications for the size of their caseload.
- Specific training tailored to the needs of scheme staff can both increase their professional competence and raise their credibility with inter-agency partners.

# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

### Background and purpose

- 1.1 In October 2002 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), now Communities and Local Government, commissioned a research team from the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol, to evaluate the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund (SCSHF) and the pilots for teenage mothers funded through the 2000/2001 round of the Approved Development Programme (ADP). The ADP pilots focused upon accommodation-based support, but the SCSHF supported both accommodation-based and floating support schemes for young people at risk; victims of domestic violence; offenders and those at risk of offending; and people with drug and alcohol problems.
- 1.2 This guide draws on the evaluation to discuss key lessons that can be drawn from the experience of developing and initially operating the schemes and to highlight aspects of good practice. It encompasses both accommodation-based and floating support schemes. Separate reports present the results of the evaluation as a whole, and focus upon the good practice lessons drawn from the provision of accommodation-based support to teenage mothers through the ADP pilots.<sup>2</sup>

### The objectives of the evaluation

- 1.3 The evaluation was concerned with assessing:
  - the effectiveness of the accommodation and support provision funded under the SCSHF and the ADP pilot programme in meeting the housing and support needs of services users.
  - the success of the provision in terms of the outcomes.
  - the success of the provision in terms of outcomes for all client groups relative to the cost of provision. The scope for addressing this third dimension proved to be extremely modest.

<sup>2</sup> *Providing Housing and Support: An Evaluation of the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund and the Approved Development Programme Pilots for Teenage Mothers*, Communities and Local Government, 2007. *ADP Pilots for Teenage Mothers: Lessons and Good Practice*, Communities and Local Government, 2007.

- 1.4 The programme objectives for the SCSHF were identified in discussion with the ODPM, now Communities and Local Government, to be:
- The reduction in crime, committed either by or against those participating in the schemes
  - Combating social exclusion of service users through:
    - Increasing their likelihood of success in living independently and sustaining a settled tenancy
    - Enhancing their engagement with education/training and with the community/positive social networks
  - Enhancing health and well-being of service users
- 1.5 Hence the schemes funded under the SCSHF and the ADP were expected to produce the following general outcomes for service users:
- Maintaining a successful independent tenancy;
  - Participation in education, training or employment, and engagement with the community/positive social networks;
  - Reducing offending (or re-offending) behaviour or instances of being a victim of crime;
  - Reducing drug and alcohol misuse; and
  - Adoption of a healthy lifestyle for selves and, where relevant, children (i.e. preventing smoking; promoting healthy eating and breast feeding).

For the ADP pilots for teenage mothers these outcomes were supplemented by the aim of avoiding further unplanned pregnancies.

- 1.6 These statements regarding objectives and outcomes are relatively broad. There is a lack of any more specific, unambiguous statement of scheme objectives, particularly in respect of the ADP stream of funding.<sup>3</sup> This makes the task of evaluation more complicated. There can, however, be a broad presumption that schemes should contribute to strategies for meeting need locally and should be engaged in inter-agency and partnership working as a mechanism through which to achieve their objectives.

<sup>3</sup> But see the following publication for an indication of the range of factors that could be considered relevant to the ADP pilot programme: Housing Corporation (2000) *Teenage Mothers: Guidance for supported accommodation*, London: The Housing Corporation. This document was produced as bidding guidance for the funding rounds that followed the one in which the pilots that form part of this study were funded.

## Methods and scope

- 1.7 The research method used for the evaluation of the accommodation-based SCSHF schemes and the ADP pilots was similar. The method employed to examine the SCSHF floating support schemes was less extensive. We can summarise the approach as follows:
- A postal survey of all organisations that received funding for either an accommodation-based or floating support scheme from the SCSHF during the first two funding rounds.
  - The selection of a set of case study schemes on the basis of the responses to the postal questionnaire.
  - Three rounds of visits to each accommodation-based case study scheme, including the ADP pilot schemes:
    - The first round interviewed scheme staff with knowledge of the background and development of the scheme and the management and operation of the scheme.
    - The second round of visits was to interview up to six service users in each scheme.
    - The aim of the third round of visits was to interview staff regarding the way the service was evolving and to re-interview users interviewed in round two, with a view to exploring how circumstances had developed and changed and the users' views on the contribution, impact and effectiveness of the schemes.
  - The third round of visits was planned to occur six months after the second round. Where it was not possible to re-interview a service user – either because they were unwilling or unable to participate or were not contactable – then the substitution of an alternative user, matched as far as possible with the non-participant in respect of the length of their participation in the scheme, was attempted. In practice, securing re-interviews proved difficult in some cases.
  - For floating support case studies there was only one round of visits. The visits encompassed both interviews with scheme staff with knowledge of the background and development of the scheme and the management and operation of the scheme and interviews with up to six service users.
  - In addition to scheme visits, for each case study we aimed to interview, usually by telephone, a selection of key stakeholders. The aim was to capture the strategic, referring agency and operational partner perspectives. Appropriate stakeholders were typically identified in discussion with scheme staff.

- For accommodation-based schemes, staff were also asked to complete and return a monitoring form each time a resident arrived or left their scheme. This was to allow us to construct a profile of the population of scheme users and to understand more about the dynamics of the resident populations.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.8 The evaluation design was to select eight accommodation-based and six floating support schemes for each of the four groups of vulnerable households – young people at risk, victims of domestic violence, offenders and those at risk of offending, and those with drug and alcohol problems – encompassed by the SCSHF. The evaluation included six case studies drawn from the 13 schemes for teenage parents funded under the 2000/01 round of the ADP. Hence, a total of 62 case studies were planned. The balance between accommodation-based and floating support case studies was somewhat different for some user groups because it became apparent relatively early in the project that the distinction between accommodation-based and floating schemes was not simple to maintain in practice. Several schemes used the SCSHF money to contribution to the operation of a hybrid or integrated approach to service provision.
- 1.9 In several of the accommodation-based schemes the timing of the research meant that it involved a group of residents who had, largely, all moved in at the same time. The start up of any new scheme will always involve a bedding-down period during which staff and multiple new residents need to establish ground rules and ways of working together. At the same time the new residents are usually experiencing significant life changes. This research may therefore have caught a particular aspect of life at these schemes. This might alter over time as residents leave and new ones arrive, and the mix of residents at different stages in their transition to independent living changes.

## Structure of this guide

- 1.10 The chapters of this guide are arranged around broad themes. Chapters open with a statement of key lessons and close with selected good practice points drawn from the experience of the case study schemes. Many of the themes are relevant to both accommodation-based and floating support schemes, although the emphasis may differ between types of scheme. Where it is not clear from the context, the discussion identifies when topics are more relevant to one type of scheme than the other. Similarly, while the specific issues facing different users groups undoubtedly vary, the broad themes we cover are relevant to all the user groups encompassed by the SCSHF and the ADP pilots. Where a point is particularly relevant to a specific user group, or a user group offers a particularly valuable example of the issue being discussed, then this is highlighted. Conversely, where a point does not apply to a specific group then this is highlighted.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of the data collection instruments used are presented in the Appendices to: *Providing Housing and Support: An Evaluation of the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund and the Approved Development Programme Pilots for Teenage Mothers, Communities and Local Government, 2007.*

- 1.11 The guide is written on the assumption that most readers are unlikely to read it from front to back in one sitting and that some topics will be more relevant to local circumstances than others. As a consequence, some key messages are repeated in more than one chapter to ensure that they are encountered by the selective reader.
- 1.12 We begin by considering broad issues associated with scheme development (Chapter 2). We then switch the focus to more specific issues related to the location and design of accommodation-based schemes (Chapter 3). Almost all support provision relies on inputs from more than one agency: the contribution of joint working is the topic of chapter 4. Questions of access and needs assessment are addressed in chapter 5. Chapter 6 is the largest chapter in the report and notes some general issues in providing support before focusing on providing support through accommodation-based schemes. The next chapter examines the transition to independent living, which in turn raises the issue of floating support. Floating support is the focus of chapter 8. The final chapter looks at operational issues, particularly in relation to staffing and processes of monitoring and learning.

## CHAPTER 2

# Developing schemes

### Key lessons

- There is a need for an overview of housing and support provision at a local level. Scheme location needs to be planned in relation to access to the relevant complementary services.
- There is a tension inherent in advertising new services with limited capacity. It raises the profile and acknowledges the importance of an issue, such as domestic violence, and demonstrates that attempts are being made to meet need, but it can raise expectations and increase demand. Schemes immediately find themselves under pressure.
- When planning services the *concentration* and *dispersion* of schemes for vulnerable users needs to be considered. This can impact upon the neighbourhoods in which schemes are located and the extent to which service users can integrate into a community.
- The acceptability of a scheme to existing residents in a locality is an important factor in scheme location. Dialogue with the community, from an early stage in the planning process, can be vital for the successful development of a scheme.
- The nature and level of support needed by each service user to make the transition to independent living varies. For some, it is a long journey requiring differing inputs at different stages, whereas for others a relatively modest amount of support at the appropriate time can suffice. The needs of some users are such that they will always require some support to able them to live independently.
- At local level accessible housing and support that can address different levels of need is required. Meeting very different levels of need is often not possible within a single scheme.
- Mixing users with very different lifestyles and needs in a single accommodation-based scheme is a strategy that needs to be treated with caution. It appears hard to operate effectively in practice.

## The need for a strategy

- 2.1 The current approach to supported housing was characterised by a respondent associated with one ADP pilot as *'adding on little bits and pieces of accommodation when and where possible'*. The SCSHF and the ADP pilots are themselves an illustration: they presented the opportunity for a very welcome injection of resources into services to meet needs that had often been well-established locally for some time. The patchwork nature of much local provision is in part a consequence of the broader policy regimes within which local providers operate. While the *Supporting People* regime has placed greater emphasis on the need for a local overview of provision, there is a need for a greater emphasis upon having a strategy at both local and national levels. In some fields this is happening: for example, the Drugs Action Team in an area which included three of the drugs and alcohol case studies had, by the end of our research, developed strategies which prioritised housing as an issue.
- 2.2 At local level, the planning of new housing and support services needs to be embedded in an understanding of the complementary services, such as childcare or training, that are integral to the model of support being envisaged. When planning schemes it is important to consider how accessible and available these other services are going to be. This can be a particular issue in rural areas. An effective overview of this type will, by its nature, require inter-agency working.
- 2.3 When planning provision there can be clear tensions between economy and effectiveness. While it may be more economical to provide services on a relatively large scale, there are arguments in favour of keeping the scale of individual schemes modest to avoid any sense of the provision being institutional and to allow users to benefit from the concentrated attention of staff. Operation on a large scale can also raise questions of acceptance by the community. The potential complexity of decisions about scale can be greater once the issue is broadened out. For example, one case study scheme which operated two small refuges for victims of domestic violence, 20 minutes drive apart, had realised that bringing the two together in one location would result in a better utilisation of the worker's time and enable the provision of increased support services, including a child worker. However, this change would mean that only one refuge would be available in the locality: safety considerations were likely to mean that some women would be compelled to move further away from any existing support network. It may not be possible to reconcile such tensions, but when adopting one strategy over another it is important to do so on the basis of a sound understanding of the trade-offs being made.
- 2.4 There are services that would feature in a comprehensive strategy for support but are currently rarely available locally. Support work that focuses upon the children of women fleeing domestic violence is one example of a service that is beneficial in helping children cope with the disruptive and traumatising effects of being in a refuge and then resettled. This might be especially advantageous in rural areas, where, as a consequence of a general scarcity of services for children and a lack of transport to allow children to participate in communal activities, there often little opportunity for children to discuss their experiences with other children in the same situation, or with a dedicated worker. An example is provided in Box 2.1.

### Box 2.1 Working with children

A rural-based scheme obtained funding from the Children's Fund to run a project to provide support to children affected by domestic violence. The focus was on children aged between five and 13 and the support workers aim to:

- Provide support programmes designed for children, in partnership with other agencies, to ensure their safety
- Design survival strategies for children still living in abusive environments
- Advocate for children who are afraid to, or have difficulty in, expressing themselves
- Work closely with schools and families to encourage home/school communication and promote the school as a place of safety
- Provide opportunities for children to participate in community activities

Work was carried out during and after the school day and operated throughout the year, including school holidays. The work is not time-limited, since the effects of domestic violence on children are often ongoing and long-term. However, this leads to a heavy caseload and not all referrals can be accepted. A further difficulty is the sparsely populated nature of the area.

The project also carries out awareness raising in schools and at seminars and is strategically involved at a variety of policy levels. It is highly rated by stakeholders. A feature of the project is the active involvement of service users in the ongoing development of the project.

## Location and community acceptance

- 2.5 The acceptance of a scheme by the existing residents of a locality is an important factor in scheme location and, ultimately, effectiveness. Considering how a scheme will integrate into a local community is an important issue when planning provision. This requires examining the question of the *concentration* and *dispersion* of schemes and vulnerable users in a locality. It is important to have an overview of existing patterns and concentrations of provision for vulnerable households, particularly those at risk of negative stereotyping, and to address preconceptions or concerns expressed by existing communities. It may not be concentrations of specific groups of users that is the issue but of supported housing of all types. As one ADP pilot noted:

*'[There was difficulty obtaining planning permission because] there were objections from the local community, because there's a lot of supported housing already in that area. So it wasn't so much about what we were using it for, it was the fact it was another supported accommodation [scheme], so there were objections to that.'*

- 2.6 Dialogue with the community, from an early stage in the planning process, can be vital in addressing community concerns and resistance. Resistance can lessen as fears relating to the siting of the scheme in the locality are not borne out in practice. However, dialogue should not cease once a scheme becomes operational, particularly should problems arise that community members take as confirming their fears about the scheme. Such problems need to be acknowledged and relations with the community managed. There are, however, situations in which the actions of the scheme can only have a limited impact upon community views: one of the SCSHF schemes for young people had taken over a building from a previous scheme and encountered continuing

community resistance, which was felt to flow as much from bad experiences with the preceding scheme as from any problems with the case study scheme.

- 2.7 While the issue of concentration is perhaps less immediately relevant to floating support schemes, it is important to recognise that there can be a tension between efficiency and integration. It is more efficient to locate users close to each other so that the support worker(s) can visit them in their own homes without a lot of travelling, but this can conflict with a concern for the users to integrate into a sustainable community. Grouping users together to the extent that they become 'visible' in the neighbourhood runs the risk of 'ghettoising' them. This issue was noted most explicitly in relation to young people.
- 2.8 The cultural diversity of an area can be an important, though sensitive, issue when considering scheme location. It was important for young mothers from minority ethnic groups, or those with babies of mixed heritage. Several of these women reported racist comments and feelings of unease where schemes were situated in mainly white areas. For schemes for women from some minority communities who are fleeing domestic violence the issue of where to locate a scheme, or who is best housed in schemes in particular locations, so as to ensure their safety and security can be complex.

## Providing support for independent living

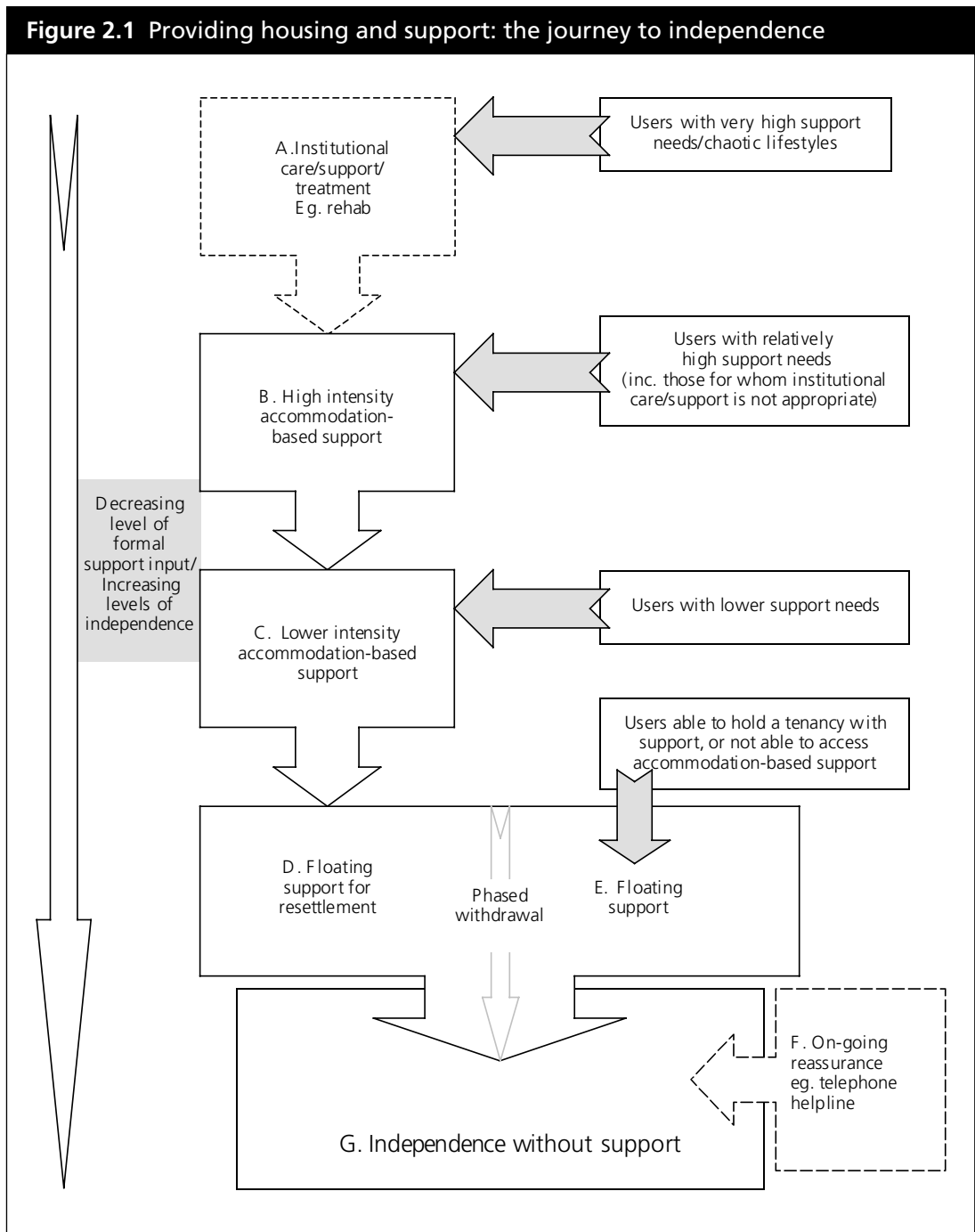
- 2.9 The support that will assist each service user to make the transition to independent living varies. For some, the journey to independence is long and requires input at differing levels at different stages over an extended period. Those with most serious needs may always require some element of ongoing support. For other service users a relatively modest amount of low intensity support at the appropriate time can suffice.
- 2.10 To maximise effectiveness, the support offered to a user needs to be matched in nature and intensity to the user's needs. Within schemes this is achieved through developing individual support and action plans. However, it is unlikely that a single accommodation-based scheme can work effectively with users with substantially different levels of need. Schemes must be clear on the range of support needs they are able to cater for, and which vulnerable households have needs that fall outside that range. This is most clearly illustrated among schemes supporting individuals with drug problems. Within drugs services there is a general acceptance of the idea of a 'hierarchy of goals' at which to aim: the reduction of health, social and other problems directly related to drug problems is an initial goal, while abstinence from all drug use is the final goal. Support schemes are geared towards working at a particular point in the hierarchy and can be ill-equipped to cope with those with different – typically higher – support needs. In terms of strategy, the need to match users and available support implies that to meet need locally there should be accessible housing and support schemes that can address support needs at different levels, both in the short-term and the longer-term.
- 2.11 Accommodating users with very different levels of need within a single scheme can place considerable, if not intolerable, strains on a particular model of support. Similarly, mixing users with very different lifestyles and needs within a

single accommodation-based scheme is a strategy that needs to be treated with caution. It appears to be hard to operate effectively. Schemes that sought to mix young mothers with young people without children, for example, or schemes that mixed young drug users with older longer term drug users found that the differences in lifestyle – such as willingness or otherwise of young people to keep noise levels low at night to allow babies to sleep – generated tensions between the groups of users. Individual users can experience a significant change of perspective in this regard if they change from one group to another – through, for example, the birth of their baby.

- 2.12 This raises a broader issue of the dangers of ‘ghettoising’ those with the highest support needs. It could also be argued that if supported housing is designed to equip people to move into independent tenancies then learning to accept diversity and to handle low level neighbour disputes is valuable. However, it should not be assumed that this will happen organically. It may be possible to overcome some of these problems and develop the residents’ skills through appropriate staffing. If this is part of the model of support then it needs to be planned for.
- 2.13 Figure 2.1 summarizes schematically the range of care and support that may be required in assisting a service user to achieve as high a degree of independence as possible. If support at all the various levels were accessible locally then this would maximise the scope for matching support provision to users’ need for support, with users entering the system at the point appropriate to their level of need.
- 2.14 This figure represents an ideal, comprehensive system of provision. There are several ways in which it differs from current local structures of provision:
- It suggests that the distinction between the support levels is relatively clear.
    - *In practice, the distinction between, for example, treatment and high intensity support can be rather blurred, but can be fundamental in terms of responsibility for service provision and sources of funding.*
  - It is structured in terms of support levels rather than organisations or schemes.
    - *The objectives of a single scheme, and the flexibility of its model of support, may allow it to provide for users with different levels of need. However, there will be upper and lower limits on the needs of the users that are likely to benefit from a particular model of support (hence, for example, while groups B and C may be successfully accommodated in the same scheme, it would not be appropriate for those in groups A or D).*
  - The figure suggests a progression from level of support A through to D, then on to independence without support (G).
    - *This assumes that each type of support is available locally to a particular user. In practice this is often not the case, with individuals being referred to an available scheme regardless of whether its model*

*of support matches the user's support needs. Alternatively, it may be, for example, that a user can access high intensity support (B) and floating support (E) but not intermediate low intensity support. This may mean that the chances of sustaining an independent tenancy are reduced because the move to floating support happens too soon. Equally, there can either be a lack of floating support for those moving out of accommodation-based schemes or the mechanisms by which users make the transition to floating support do not work smoothly in every case.*

- The figure could be read as suggesting that all those who are accessing floating support directly (E) have a lower level of need than those users who receive accommodation-based support.
  - *There is a tendency for floating support users to be nearer independence than those accessing accommodation-based support, but there is overlap between the two groups. For some, such as some victims of domestic violence, people with enduring mental health problems or chaotic drug or alcohol users, an inability or unwillingness to access accommodation-based support is not necessarily an indication that they have relatively low level needs.*
- The figure could be read as suggesting that services should aim to push all towards independence without support (G).
  - *While this may be the objective for most groups, it is not necessarily appropriate for all. For some (e.g. people with disabilities), the objective may more appropriately be to achieve as high a degree of independence as possible.*



2.15 The orderly progression from higher to lower intensity support suggested by Figure 2.1 implies a user’s journey towards independence is in one direction. This is not always the case, and to assume that it is leads to inflexibility. Users may suffer setbacks on their journey to independence, which necessitate a move or return to higher levels of support. Traumas such as family bereavements can, for example, result in individuals feeling less able to cope alone. Hence, local structures of support should ideally be flexible enough to allow users to move from low to high intensity accommodation-based support and back again, or from floating support to accommodation-based support, should the need arise. The flexibility to allow for trial periods living with lower level support would also be valuable for some users. An example is provided in Box 2.2. However, at present this sort of flexibility can be difficult to achieve in practice. Pressures to ensure services are fully utilized mean that maintaining

the capacity to respond to acute events is difficult. Similarly, if funding frameworks build in assumptions about a progression in one direction, towards independence, they militate against this type of flexibility.

- 2.16 The final key component of Figure 2.1 is independent living and, importantly, the figure suggests that independent living encompasses a range of living arrangements. Only some of those who might appropriately be deemed to be living independently achieve independence without support of any kind (G). A key observation is the role that can be played by provision of support in the form of on-going reassurance to people attempting to live independently (F). Knowing that there is someone at the end of a telephone who is knowledgeable and willing to listen, should they be needed, can be all that is required to give individuals the strength to carry on living independently. Other services such as drop-in centres can also act as a resource to service users who are forging an independent life for themselves. The availability of this type of support can be valuable as a final stage for those whose formal support relationships have ended, before the move on to independence without support. This type of support can also be valuable in helping users to cope if a crisis occurs. Equally, it can be seen as preventative – a first point of contact where very low level support and advice can be sufficient to keep someone living independently and stop the need for support escalating.
- 2.17 Figure 2.1 maps out a process through which the ultimate outcome is independence without support (G). This is most clearly applicable to those whose status as vulnerable is temporary and who can, in principle, move to independent living without support. Yet, there are vulnerable households whose needs are such that independent living will always involve the provision of some form of ongoing support. Hence, for example, the withdrawal of floating support under either D or E will never be total. This may apply to some households, such as those with drug or mental health problems, who received services funded by the SCSHF. If we widen our focus to include other types of vulnerable households – such as older people with dementia or people with disabilities – it is evident that there are households who face longer-term or permanent issues and who will therefore require long term support. Such households can be seen as being able to live independently with appropriate support, rather than deeming them unable to live independently.

#### **Box 2.2 Providing flexible, responsive support**

One case study scheme for young people at risk had developed a Foyer service with linked move-on accommodation. This was an attempt to develop their ideal response to a young person's needs, based upon the understanding that the move to independence for a young person is not a linear process. The scheme was able to move a young person from the Foyer to the semi-independent move-on accommodation, but then back to the Foyer if it became apparent that (s)he was not yet ready to manage all the demands of semi-independent living. This had happened in the case of one young woman, who had become re-established in the Foyer and could remain there until she has developed more confidence and autonomy. At that point it was anticipated that she would be able to move back into the move-on accommodation.

It was hoped that it would become possible to use this model of working with young people more frequently, re-assessing young people's needs in different situations and responding flexibly to suit their needs at that particular time.

## Developing schemes: Good practice points

- Embed the development of individual housing and support schemes in a broader strategy for meeting the needs of vulnerable households and a comprehensive understanding of the availability of complementary services that will be integral to the success of the scheme.
- Ensure that the local community is informed about proposed developments from an early stage and that any community concerns are addressed at the earliest opportunity. This can be vital to the scheme's acceptance and its long-term sustainability. Dialogue with the community should continue once the scheme is operational.
- One size does not fit all when providing support in moving towards independent living. Local structures of support should encompass provision for households with varying degrees of need. To maximise effectiveness these resources need to be used flexibly, including scope for service users to return temporarily to higher levels of support in order to cope with adverse events.
- Low level support, to be called upon as and when required rather than as part of a formal support agreement, can play an important role in reassuring vulnerable households and giving them the strength to continue living independently.

## CHAPTER 3

# The location and design of accommodation-based schemes

### Key lessons

- An inappropriate location can significantly affect the popularity of a scheme and the quality of life of its residents. Yet, potential properties and sites for supported housing are often considered precisely because they have already proved themselves less popular as general needs housing or are in areas of relatively low market values.
- It is important to understand clearly how residents will use a scheme and how the support provided by the scheme will sit in relation to contact with external providers of formal and informal support. Location in relation to amenities, transport routes and distance from support networks are therefore critical issues.
- Providing a safe and stable environment within which users can rebuild their lives and begin to think about the future is fundamental. Safety and security are particularly valued by all groups of service users.
- Scheme design must be informed by a strong awareness of the needs of users, ideally through consultation with potential users, and achieve acceptable standards of provision, particularly in terms of space. The alternative is a scheme that struggles to fill its vacancies.
- Scheme design needs to focus on usable space and consider issues of equity in access to space. Arrangements for exterior access – whether to have individual or communal front door(s) or to use security cameras to monitor movements – exemplify the tensions that must be addressed in striking the balance between independence and supervision.
- Communal space plays a key role in the way the scheme functions, in particular in encouraging peer support. Whether shared space is managed formally or informally can significantly influence the residents' experience of living in a scheme.
- Conversely, quiet rooms or private spaces are important for one to one interviews or meetings with workers or visitors.
- Particular attention needs to be given to the provision of appropriate office space, where staff are based on-site, and to the way in which staff use the scheme and the shared space.
- For schemes that will be used intensively, particular thought must be given to a programme of repair, maintenance and replacement which reflects the level and nature of usage.

## Scheme location

3.1 The location of a scheme contributes directly to the success of the model of support and the quality of life of its residents. Three aspects of location are important:

- Physical safety
- Popularity
- Accessibility

### **PHYSICAL SAFETY**

3.2 Residents from all the vulnerable groups being supported by SCSHF and ADP funded schemes valued the scheme because it provided a safe and secure environment within which to rebuild their lives. What they were seeking safety and security from differed. It could have been a specific threat such as an abusive partner, a peer group that was having a negative impact upon their life, or drug dealing and usage. But it could also be a more general threat of violence – many had been victims of crime – or the dangers of street-living or racist abuse. For a scheme to provide a safe environment required a combination of a safe location and a physical design that fostered a sense of security.

3.3 It is important to understand the issues facing individual users because there may be instances where, as a result of their specific circumstances, a scheme that is safe in general is not in a safe location for them.

### **POPULARITY**

3.4 Location is crucial in making schemes a reasonable option for service users. Is it in an area in which they will want to live? It is not untypical for sites and properties to be considered for supported housing schemes because they have already proved themselves to be less popular as general needs housing. In part this is understandable because it is one way of accessing cheaper land or properties and delivering schemes to a tight budget and in line with cost ceilings. Yet, siting a scheme in an area known locally to be unpopular can significantly increase the difficulties in attracting residents. Hence the scheme can find itself struggling to fill vacancies. There was certainly a minority of our case study schemes that explicitly acknowledged that poor location was an issue in attracting residents. Clearly, there is a danger of a false economy in directing the development of supported housing to cheaper or less popular areas in order to save money, only to find that few choose to live there.

3.5 Be aware of the possibilities of unpopularity as a result of intolerance. One of the ADP schemes is located in an area which is generally perceived as 'racist'. This not only caused concerns for residents who are themselves members of minority communities, but also for women who had babies of mixed heritage, or who had partners, friends or family at whom racist remarks or threats were directed.

## ACCESSIBILITY

- 3.6 A scheme needs to be considered in terms of the accessibility of amenities and external sources of formal and informal support that users may draw on during their residence. Fostering residents' independence requires that they have access to facilities and services necessary to maintain a home and to provide and care for themselves and, where relevant, their babies or children. Accessibility is not simply about distance but also about location in relation to transport routes. However, the significance of this issue is likely to depend upon the users a scheme is seeking to support:
- For those users early in their journey to independent living, who may be relatively socially isolated and receiving the majority of their support formally at the scheme, the question of broader accessibility may be less pressing;
  - In contrast, schemes for residents, such as teenage parents, who draw much of their support from external sources and who are expected to participate in education or training, and might need to access childcare, will need to give attention to scheme location in relation to facilities, transport links such as a major bus route, and the likely locations from which users will originate – to allow access to areas in which existing social networks are located.
- 3.7 However good the scheme design, failing to consider fully the issue of accessibility can lead to a scheme being in an awkward location and residents feeling, as one young mother we interviewed did, that they would like to '*pick up the scheme and move it*'.

## Scheme design

- 3.8 Scheme design encompasses both *exterior access* and *internal layout*. Scheme design must be informed by a strong awareness of the needs of users, ideally through consultation with potential users, and achieve acceptable standards of provision, particularly in terms of space. Greater user involvement during the design, planning and specification stage tends to lead to more positive assessments of design by residents. Some examples of the impacts of consultation are given in Box 3.1. When designing a scheme it is also important to take account of more fundamental concerns such as the need to ensure accessibility for disabled users. Consultation with users can avoid fundamental mistakes on this front. One scheme for women and children with physical impairments was developed without an access ramp because consultation had not been adequate.

### Box 3.1 Involving users in design

In planning and designing schemes, consultation with service users, including children, can provide valuable information that is not available elsewhere. One case study scheme for women fleeing domestic violence included a purpose-built refuge which, following consultation, was designed to contain a multi-faith prayer room and units that could be linked together to make provision for larger families. In addition to small interview rooms and office accommodation, the scheme included a "women's room" which is staffed by one worker whenever the office is open. Women felt that this room provided a better atmosphere in which to discuss problems than a crowded office.

Children were also involved in discussions, particularly in relation to the playroom. Unfortunately, it was not possible to include some of their more imaginative suggestions, such as a slide or a fireman's pole from the playroom to a pool in the garden.

Design modifications that will improve liveability do not have to be substantial. For example, users at one scheme requested outside washing lines. This was a simple request that was easily accommodated and much appreciated.

## EXTERIOR ACCESS

- 3.9 Providing a safe environment is fundamental, and particularly valued by services users. The means of exterior access makes a major contribution to delivering security. It is also significant because it can shape the nature of relationships not only within the scheme but also with the local community.
- 3.10 Designing exterior access is an instance of the way in which schemes must reconcile the tension between independence and supervision:
- Should access be communal or should each resident have their own external front door?
  - Should access be monitored through, for example, the use of security cameras, which can be experienced as reassuring by some but highly intrusive by others?
- 3.11 It is likely that schemes based around refurbishing existing properties face limited flexibility in relation to whether access is communal. In circumstances where proposals are for a new build scheme, there is genuine choice over how best to arrange physical access.
- 3.12 For some users, security can be such an overriding concern that alternatives to supervised, communal access are not feasible. This is the case in schemes for victims of domestic violence. Similarly, residents of drug and alcohol case study schemes prioritised issues of security and accepted the need for measures like security cameras and surveillance of communal areas.
- 3.13 While many schemes have communal entrances they differ in the way entry and exit is supervised. For some, the placement of a staff office near the front door allows for more or less formal monitoring of movements, and can open up the possibility of informal contact with residents, which can be an important component of support. In other instances, security cameras allow schemes to monitor security remotely. While some residents may find these approaches intrusive, schemes with shared entrances offer benefits such as allowing internal

front doors to be left open, with residents and, where relevant, children able to move freely between flats. Separate front doors for each resident, in contrast, can give residents a greater sense of privacy, independence and responsibility. As a consequence, it is harder for staff to monitor activities, particularly in terms of visitors, noise and possible antisocial behaviour. This can then impact upon relationships within the scheme and with residents of neighbouring properties.

## INTERNAL LAYOUT

3.14 A key element in facilitating the success of a scheme is its internal design. In particular, it is important to consider:

- the availability of *usable* space
- equitable access and allocation of space
- shared space and privacy

3.15 The key design concern must be whether available space is *usable* and *suitable* for its intended occupants:

- Space can be unusable when it is part of hallways rather than rooms, for example. Its usability can be affected by awkward room arrangements and access.
- Suitability is most sharply highlighted in the case of schemes for residents with children. Key aspects of design will make a scheme more or less liveable: Are hallways wide enough to accommodate buggies comfortably? Does the property have a lot of stairs that will be difficult to negotiate holding a baby? Are rooms of a size that is adequate to provide sufficient storage space, including cupboards for baby equipment, or to accommodate a growing and increasingly mobile baby? More generally, which rooms are, or will be, overlooked by neighbouring properties and will that constrain their use?

3.16 Where the physical layout of a scheme is less than ideal, it is possible to be creative and flexible in the use of space, such as using large hallways to deliver training.

3.17 When planning a scheme the issue of equity should be considered. If a scheme has rooms or flats that are significantly different in size, or any other dimension that is likely to affect their desirability to residents, then thought needs to be given to the process of allocation and how this will be perceived by residents. There can also be difficulties if allocation processes that address possible inequities rely on internal moves – for example, a young woman moving from a smaller to a larger room once her baby is born – because these can be difficult to manage in practice and rely on referrals conforming to a particular pattern in relation to available vacancies. Concerns over inequities occurred at a number of our case study schemes, typically involving younger people. It is more likely to be a potential issue for schemes based in converted properties because there is less flexibility over internal layout. An awareness of this aspect of the social

dynamics of a scheme is important when identifying properties suitable for conversion. Concerns may be substantial enough to conclude that a property is unsuitable for supported housing.

## Shared space and privacy

3.18 All schemes must strike a balance between shared space and privacy. Determining the extent to which residents are able to live independently or are required or expected to share rooms and facilities should not simply be a question of physical design. It should be integral to the model of support being developed, even when the building places physical constraints on what is possible. Some scheme workers feel that residents having their own bathroom, kitchen and front door was an important factor in maintaining harmony in the scheme. Yet, encouraging social interaction and fostering peer support typically require interaction in shared, communal space.

3.19 The sharing of rooms or facilities will affect the dynamics of a scheme and needs careful handling. Key issues are:

- Is sharing managed informally or formally?

*The greater the formality – for example, the imposition of detailed rotas for use of facilities such as the washing machine – the greater the risk of residents feeling that supervision and structure is a problem that constrains their scope for independence.*

- How freely can residents access communal facilities?

*Where, for example, access to the communal kitchen or washing machine is via a communal lounge, this can be problematic – especially if the communal lounge is also sometimes used for meetings or locked out of hours.*

3.20 It is important that communal space is large enough to allow resident meetings or, where relevant, to run on-site training sessions. Yet, at the same time it needs to be on a scale that means it feels personal and homely. Where it was a feature of a scheme, sharing of communal rooms or facilities was mostly unproblematic for residents of the case study schemes. Generally, for those who used it, the sharing of the communal space was seen positively. There were, however, cases of schemes for young people in which large communal areas attracted comments from residents that it felt ‘institutional’. Non-residents could also linger in these areas – making the scheme feel less like home.

3.21 Where the communal areas include outdoor space, typically a garden, these can be used with differing regularity. Outdoor space can make a positive contribution to the life of a scheme, but unless thought is given to the way in which the space is used then the net effect may be less positive. A garden can be an asset for informal gatherings, for growing vegetables to be used in shared cookery sessions, for holding summer events for family or as a safe outdoor area for children to play. Alternatively, as in one ADP scheme, it can be used primarily by mothers who smoke – who won’t smoke indoors with their babies – and if

residents are seeking to participate in these informal gatherings this can result in pressure to smoke also.

- 3.22 Shared space is therefore an important component of scheme design. Conversely, thought needs to be given to the availability of private spaces or quiet rooms in which one to one confidential interviews or meetings with workers or visitors can take place. It should not be presumed that residents will want such potentially formal interviews or meetings to take place in the private space of their flat/bedroom. Moreover, privacy is not simply a question of being able to close the door on other residents. For example, while office space with large internal windows or glass walls might allow workers to supervise what is occurring beyond their office walls, they also allow residents to be observed when they seek a private conversation with a worker.
- 3.23 Residents share space with staff as well as other residents. Care needs to be taken over the way in which staff use the scheme and shared space. This can be very significant in shaping the residents' experiences of a scheme. It can influence directly the extent to which residents feel the scheme is their home. The aim should be to create a sense of security and a feeling of belonging among the users, even when they realise that they can only live in the scheme temporarily. How staff use the space can significantly advance or frustrate this aim. We discuss this more fully later in this report.
- 3.24 In schemes with on-site staff a balance needs to be struck between residential space and office space. There must be adequate office space, particularly with the inclusion of appropriate private space (as per para 3.22). Yet, schemes should avoid being so dominated by office space and workers that it undermines the sense of the scheme as the residents' home rather than a place of work. For this reason, proposals to base workers at a scheme who do not in fact play a role in the life of scheme should be treated with care.

## **BEYOND PHYSICAL DESIGN**

- 3.25 Internal design is not simply about physical space. The good decorative state of many of the schemes funded under SCSHF was particularly appreciated. However, in a minority of cases, there were concerns over the quality of fixtures and fittings. Attention to small details, such as the quality of carpets, is important in ensuring that schemes are user-, and particularly child-, friendly.
- 3.26 Thought needs to be given to maintaining the quality of the accommodation provided by supported housing schemes, particularly those housing children. Some schemes have a relatively high turnover of residents and can be in high intensity use all the time. Refuges for women and children victims of domestic violence are the clearest example of schemes where there is inevitably, as a result of high occupancy levels and turnover, a lot of wear and tear on the décor, fixtures and fittings. If the scheme is to continue to be viewed as a high quality option then an appropriate programme of repair, maintenance and replacement is required. This needs to be budgeted for when costing to run a scheme and funders need to be willing to fund to the appropriate level.

## A safe environment: the interaction of behaviour and design

- 3.27 Ensuring security is not simply about physical design and security systems. It also entails all residents following agreed rules, particularly in relation to visitors. However, the implications for other residents of violations of such rules depend on physical design: they can be more serious and unsettling for those living in more communally accessed and structured schemes.

### Bringing it all together

- 3.28 The way these design features – location, internal design, external access, and the sharing of space by residents and neighbours – are combined will shape the success of a scheme. Box 3.2 provides a portrait of one of the ADP pilot schemes that indicates the way in which it is possible to get most of the ingredients right but find that the success of the resulting scheme is not complete.

#### **Box 3.2 Location and design: the difficulties in getting it right**

One attractive new build pilot scheme was designed as a group of two storey houses, each split into a ground floor and a first floor flat. Bathrooms contained both a bath and shower (identified through user involvement as essential for pregnant women and babies). Storage cupboards and space in hallways for buggies were included. The houses were grouped around a grassed area with pathways to the individual front doors and there was a soft-paved area with children's play equipment. Residents reported this garden space to be well used in the summer months. The shared entrance into the scheme was overlooked by the staff office. A large, bright playroom was equipped with toys and was large enough to enable meetings or training sessions to be held there. The entrance to the playroom was not overlooked by staff. No CCTV was installed here and staffing was not 24 hour. Although there were some concerns voiced about the quality of the build, the design was generally seen as very good.

However, the location of the scheme was felt by residents to be inappropriate, with concerns about safety, acceptance by the local community and isolation. Additionally, some (disputed) complaints about the residents' behaviour had been received from people in an adjoining new build, privately owned estate.

## Location and design: Good practice points

- Scheme location is vital, particularly in relation to physical safety, popularity of the neighbourhood and accessibility. Accessibility needs to be considered in terms of transport links, amenities and facilities, and the location of the social networks of likely service users. Location is crucial in making a scheme sustainable.
- Involving users in the design and specification of a scheme is recommended.
- Models of support need to be considered at the design stage. Scheme design needs to strike the balance between independence and supervision, and between fostering independence and encouraging peer support, with great care.
- Creating a safe environment is vital to the support of all vulnerable households, but supervision and monitoring should not be unnecessarily intrusive. Design a scheme in such a way as to facilitate non-intrusive informal contact, e.g. locating the office next to a communal area or shared entrance.
- Focus on usable space. In particular, make sure that communal space is large enough to allow group meetings and, where relevant, safe play areas for children, but sufficiently private to allow it to feel personal and homely.
- Ensure that the physical design of the scheme minimizes the possibility of residents feeling they are treated inequitably.
- Include space in which confidential one to one conversations and interviews between residents and workers can occur unobserved.

## CHAPTER 4

# The contribution of joint working

### Key lessons

- Few organisations working alone can support a vulnerable person with complex needs: the range of expertise required is too great. Most case study schemes operated a model of support that required inputs from other agencies. Successful joint working arrangements were therefore vital.
- Joint working is facilitated by a sense of shared, on-going commitment to assisting the user.
- Networking plays a range of important strategic and operational roles in scheme activities. Ensuring that schemes are linked in, informally and possibly formally, with local statutory sector strategies and agencies can be very valuable.
- There is always potential to extend external links, but inter-agency networks require maintenance and available resources may impose limits on networking activity.
- Ongoing support from key local stakeholders can be strategically and symbolically important in reinforcing a scheme's value in meeting local needs.
- Informal relationships are often central to service delivery in the early months of a scheme's operation. However, relying on informal relationships presents difficulties when staff move on. Setting up more formal agreements can be important in ensuring continuity of service and clarity of roles.
- Successful collaborative working relies on clear lines of communication and allocation of responsibility between partner agencies: lack of clarity can create uncertainties leading to a breakdown in support to individuals.

## Joint working as integral to service provision

- 4.1 The vulnerable people referred to in the case study schemes typically had a variety of support needs, some of them substantial. The focus of the support scheme – be it working with victims of domestic violence or ex-offenders – may well be only one part of a complex situation or set of issues. Even when a scheme opts to use its workers to provide a lot of personal support, other agencies are important in providing additional services that are beyond the remit and expertise of scheme staff. This provision includes inputs from statutory services such as Social Services Child Care Teams, Probation or Youth Offending Teams, which may be particularly concerned with questions of risk; statutory sector agencies such as Connexions, programmes such as Sure Start, or community-based drug and alcohol support; and voluntary agencies or community-based programmes such as Toy Libraries. Viewed from another perspective, accommodation-based schemes are in a good position to offer a focus for a broad range of services because they provide a ‘*captive audience*’ for the delivery of key statutory services.

## Links with other agencies

- 4.2 Informal links with other agencies are important in distinct ways:

- At scheme inception

*The impetus for a scheme can often come from informal contact with other agencies around a particular set of housing and support needs that are not being met locally. Consulting widely before the scheme is set up can develop early stakeholder support for the scheme.*

- Embedding and co-ordinating

*A networking role can raise awareness of a new scheme and liaise with other possible support providers, which can help embed a scheme in local structures of provision. It can contribute to counteracting any tendency on the part of referring agencies to pass on responsibility for meeting the users’ needs because they make erroneous assumptions about the services provided by a scheme. Networking can also be invaluable in identifying and mobilising existing local resources which may be poorly coordinated and underused.*

- Maintaining effectiveness and relevance

*Informal discussion and consultation can allow schemes to respond rapidly to concerns or new developments and ensure that they continue to meet local strategic objectives and to play a key role in local provision networks.*

- 4.3 Good informal relationships with other agencies rarely arise overnight. They are often built up over many years. Considerable effort can be necessary to build up good networks of personal contacts with other support providers. It may

eventually become second nature: *'You network without thinking about it because you know you can't do everything. So you automatically pick a phone up ... it's just how it is in the voluntary sector.'*

- 4.4 There is, however, a danger in relying too heavily on informal contacts. Specifically, it means that a service comes to depend on individual members of staff. If key staff move to new jobs then it can be difficult to keep the service on track and, more particularly, to maintain the quality of the relationships with key partners. Partners can be left unsure about their role. While relying on informal contacts during the development of a new service may be appropriate, moving over time towards more formally structured relationships between partners can help to ensure clarity and continuity.
- 4.5 As a scheme becomes better established, and particularly if it also grows, it becomes necessary to consider putting the partnership on a more formal footing through agreeing service level standards with partner agencies. This can be linked directly to the continuing evolution of a service: *'In some ways we haven't needed [them up till now] because we've had such good personal relationships. But people will move on and things will change so it would be useful to have everybody signed up...'* However, the process of formalisation needs sensitive handling if it is not to undermine existing relationships: a move to greater formality could be interpreted as indicating a lack of trust.
- 4.6 Formal partnerships with other support providers can be helpful in:
- Overseeing the development and provision of a service
  - Coordinating existing services
  - Establishing new and more productive ways of delivering services.
- 4.7 In addition to the well-established practice of involving an inter-agency steering group in the process of establishing a scheme and the ongoing monitoring of its performance, a steering group can be helpful in the operational phase through, for example, sharing responsibility for management of risk in accommodation-based schemes where 24-hour cover is not provided.
- 4.8 Collaborative working flourishes in an environment of mutual respect. It is not assisted when, for example, a scheme run by a housing association has its credibility questioned when trying to access local services, on the grounds that it is not staffed by health or social work professionals. It may be necessary to engage other agencies in dialogue to build trust and respect, thereby laying the groundwork for successful collaboration.
- 4.9 While collaboration between agencies is an integral part of most models of support, and in most case studies such relationships were reported to be positive, it is also the case that in some localities and sectors collaboration between voluntary sector agencies is negatively affected by a broader context in which they are competing against each other, including for funding. This can be brought particularly sharply into focus in the drug and alcohol field where differences in underlying philosophies of support may be involved.

## Joint working in individual cases

- 4.10 Vulnerable people with particularly complex needs will often be referred to a scheme with the ongoing involvement of statutory services. It is important to recognise that many users will have a longer term relationship with a referring agency such as social services than they will have with the organisation providing support, either accommodation-based or floating. Keeping the longer-term relationship functioning is important for continuity of support. Schemes need to be proactive in engaging with social workers to plan work jointly. This is the best way to capitalize on work that has already been done and to ensure continuity when the service user moves on. One option that can work well is formally building in three way meetings – between the service user, the support worker and the referring worker – on a regular (e.g. monthly) basis as part of the keyworking system. This is illustrated by the example in Box 4.1.

### Box 4.1 Joint working for integrated and efficient support

Many of the young people resident in supported accommodation will have, at some stage, been looked after by the state and are therefore entitled to the support of a Leaving Care (or After Care) worker, as well as the support of scheme workers. It is not impossible, therefore, to find that there will either be duplication of effort on the part of the scheme's support worker and the Leaving Care worker, or that some of the young person's needs remain unmet because each worker believes that the other has taken responsibility for meeting them.

One case study scheme that managed this relationship well held joint meetings between the Leaving Care worker and the support worker to ensure that the action plan developed within the project complemented the Pathway Plan developed by the Leaving Care worker. In this way, the workers could ensure that responsibilities were clear and that the young person's needs were met, enhancing efficiency for both workers.

- 4.11 Good planning and communication between agencies is vital at the point when a user joins a scheme. When joint planning in relation to individual users, it is vital to assess realistically both the planning processes and the capacity for delivery of all the organisations involved. In planning at this level clarifying responsibilities and commitments is essential:

*'We don't just assume that someone's going to do something, we tend to make sure. We would speak to the social worker and say "Are you going to take responsibility for sorting this out or are we going to take responsibility for it?" Otherwise you find it doesn't get done.'*

- 4.12 Schemes need to be alert to the possibility that the referring agency, while committing to ongoing involvement in principle, will in practice look to pass responsibility for the service user on to the scheme itself. They may then find themselves left to manage difficult issues on their own, as this comment from a worker at an accommodation-based scheme illustrates:

*'... there can be major crises and so we phone ... because they are the other agency that's supposed to be supporting this young person. You hear all this wonderful stuff about how they're going to do this, this and this and how they'll keep in contact. After they've moved in, that's it "Bye, Bye" and off they go.'*

- 4.13 Clarifying responsibilities can be broader than who provides support in specific circumstances. To take one example: one scheme for young people at risk had thousands of pounds worth of damage caused to two of their flats and it was initially unclear who would pay for the damage to be repaired – the social service team with overall responsibility for the young person, the housing department that placed the residents, or the housing association which provided the accommodation. While in these circumstances a housing association might look to charge the residents, this is not always practical or reasonable: for example, if it is known that they will be unable to pay, or the behaviour is triggered by an external problem or by some shortfall in support provision. In these latter instances the resident could be deemed not to be culpable for their actions and hence responsibility may lie elsewhere. Partnership agreements may not spell out in any detail how responsibility for this type of event should be determined, and even if they do then such agreements are not necessarily enforceable. Good partnership working needs to allow open dialogue to reflect upon events – Was the risk assessment adequate? Was the support plan appropriate? Was it implemented adequately? – in order to identify what went wrong, and hence who might reasonably be expected to cover the expense. However, the practical difficulties associated with reaching agreement in these circumstances should not be underestimated.

## Sharing information

- 4.14 Good communication between agencies is vital. Clarifying procedures for sharing information is a key task when planning joint working. Ensuring processes operate as planned can be vital to successful service delivery. Joint working requires information to flow both ways, and there need to be opportunities to discuss developments. One scheme for ex-offenders opted to base their support worker at the local Probation office and this facilitated better communication and co-ordination. When information stops flowing – for example, a failure to communicate that a service user has mental health issues or that a young person's licence period has ended and they would no longer be receiving support from the Youth Offending Team – then this can lead to gaps in support. However, information needs to be shared in accord with the confidentiality agreements in place and data protection legislation. Yet, the case study experiences suggest that there can be considerable differences in the way data protection legislation is interpreted, and there was a feeling that in some instances agencies were overly rigid in their approach to confidentiality and that this in turn can impede support provision. If there is doubt in this area then seeking clarification is essential.
- 4.15 There may be circumstances in which there are benefits to restricting particular information flows. For example, confidentiality agreements in place at one ADP scheme meant that information was not routinely shared between Health Visitors and staff, but this meant that young women could talk with the Health Visitor, in confidence, about issues that they felt unable to tell staff at the scheme.

## The contribution of joint working: Good practice points

- At the *scheme level*, even though informal contact can be very valuable, it is unwise to rely on it. It is important to put inter-agency involvement on a formal footing which does not over-depend on personal contacts and which specifies the nature and purpose of the inter-agency contact. This can clarify responsibilities and increase transparency and accountability.
- Good working relationships are needed at both strategic and operational level. Good working relationships between the frontline workers of partner agencies are beneficial, but if relationships only exist at this level problems are dealt with on a case by case basis. Appropriate reporting mechanisms within and across organisations can ensure that recurrent issues are identified and dealt with strategically.
- Ensure that all agencies are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities in relation to the support being offered to avoid duplication or gaps in support.
- Schemes should stay in touch with key stakeholders when everything is going well, rather than just when there are problems or when changes to the scheme were being planned.
- Statutory and voluntary sector agencies experience regular change and restructuring. Workers need to be up to date with changes in provision, staffing or procedures occurring in the other agencies with which they work. This ensures that they continue to act as an effective channel for linking service users to the support they need.
- Joint working relating to *individual service users* requires good communication and planning at the point of entry. Initial joint planning should be followed by monthly contact with referring agencies, where appropriate, in negotiation with the service user. This reduces the risk of referring agencies disengaging, allows the scheme to build effectively on previous work, and increases continuity of support.
- A flexible approach to sharing information between agencies working jointly can maximise effectiveness, but it requires good understandings about confidentiality, data protection and the boundaries on further sharing of information.

## CHAPTER 5

# Accessing schemes, assessing applicants

### Key lessons

- Schemes benefit from a clear vision of the service user profile that will mesh with the model of support they are proposing. This can assist in managing the flow of referrals.
- Clarity over the referral process is essential – referring agencies must understand the types of user and the level of need that a scheme is designed to support.
- If there are insufficient users with the appropriate level of need to fill a scheme then scheme managers need to decide their response. Will they take on users with different – typically higher – levels of need, with the possibility of needing to change the model of support as a consequence? Or will they seek to attract more users with the appropriate level of need by, for example, broadening the geographical area covered?
- It is vital to ensure that the application process functions well. Managing and clarifying expectations through good communication is fundamental. Potential service users must be very clear about the need to engage with the model of support operated, including the keyworking process.
- Keeping allocations policies under review can play a role in addressing negative incidents during the operation of accommodation-based schemes.
- Many of the accommodation-based case study schemes had clarified their referral criteria with referring agencies or reviewed their allocations policy and procedures in the light of inappropriate referrals.
- Initial needs assessments may not highlight the full extent of service users' needs. Monitoring systems that rely on assessment at the point of entry may therefore understate need. Formal monitoring should be complemented by a qualitative understanding of service users' needs. Keyworking processes should recognise the gradual nature of disclosure.

## Access policies and the applications process

- 5.1 Many housing and support schemes are developed in localities with excess demand for services from users with different levels of need. Schemes need a clear vision of the service user profile that will mesh with the particular model of support they are proposing. This can assist in managing the flow of referrals to the scheme so that the individuals accepted are those whose needs can be met effectively. In contrast, in contexts where there is excess demand for services from those with high levels of need, or insufficient referrals of service users with the level of need for which the scheme was planned, it may be necessary to balance the competing imperatives to:
- keep a balance of higher and lower need service users within the scheme in order to allow workers to provide the appropriate levels of support and, if it is an accommodation-based scheme, to create a sustainable community.
  - fill vacancies as soon as they arise in order to minimize loss of revenue.
- 5.2 Where higher need applicants form an increasing proportion of referrals – because, for example, the source of referrals changes over time – there may be a need to review the allocations policy and, ultimately, the sustainability of the model of support being operated. A scheme where most service users have higher levels of need is likely to require additional staffing.
- 5.3 Even without a change in the composition of referrals it is good practice to keep policies on access and the application process under review. Many accommodation-based case study schemes revised their referral criteria and lettings policies and procedures because they had received inappropriate referrals or had accepted individual referrals that had led to subsequent problems within the scheme. For example, several accommodation-based schemes for those with drug and alcohol problems did not require abstinence as a basis for entry. Until referral criteria were clarified there was a danger that they could become a dumping ground for people with accommodation needs but no intention of addressing their drug or alcohol use. Several case study schemes increased the detail of their referral procedure to identify service users with more complex problems and ensure that it was possible to provide suitable support. However, referring agencies did not always indicate the full range of problems and there is some lack of clarity on issues of data protection in this area. Equally, some issues do not become evident until the user has moved in.
- 5.4 It is vital to ensure that during the application process expectations are managed and responsibilities on both sides clarified. On the basis of experience, case study schemes made changes to increase clarity including:
- improving communication with potential residents during the application process.
  - discussing the ethos of accommodation-based schemes pointedly with applicants prior to acceptance to ensure they were clear about what would be required.

- interviewing all potential residents for accommodation-based schemes at their current place of residence as part of their application process, with their current partners included in the process and other agencies referred to for information (where appropriate and with permission).
- revising the way in which the keyworking system was explained.

The aim was to ensure that applicants thought carefully about the implications of joining a scheme – particularly the need to engage with the keyworking and, for accommodation-based schemes, what would be expected of residents in terms of observing scheme rules, such as those relating to visitors, security, or drug and alcohol use – before choosing to do so.

## Support needs, assessment and monitoring

- 5.5 Schemes undertake a needs assessment of potential users on entry, but the process varies in formality and the extent to which it attempts to gather information prior to an applicant joining the scheme. This is an area in which data protection concerns can be encountered: how much information can a referring agency legally pass on? Clarity on this point is vital: where uncertainty exists it can seem prudent to share the minimum amount of information. This has the potential to make service provision less effective than it might otherwise be. Working within the consent of service users is always good practice. Establishing appropriate understandings and protocols for information exchange between agencies also makes a core contribution to effective joint working.
- 5.6 While undertaking an accurate and detailed need and risk assessment before accepting a service user on to a scheme can contribute to ensuring that there is a good match between the service and its users, this can be in tension with other pressures. One accommodation-based scheme for young people, for example, found it difficult to go through a full assessment if a young person was living in clearly unsuitable accommodation – such as a hostel for adults with drug problems – because scheme workers wanted to ‘rescue’ the young person as quickly as possible.
- 5.7 Both accommodation-based and floating support schemes can encompass support with general life skills; emotional support; education and training; and, where relevant, support with parenting and on health services such as contraception.
- 5.8 Support to service users is tailored to individual need. It is not uncommon for service users to describe themselves as having low support needs at the time of joining the scheme. While for some users this may be an accurate appreciation of their situation, for others it may be misleading. Residents’ support needs are often higher than those established at the outset of the tenancy. At least three reasons can be identified for this:
- Some needs cannot be articulated until a trusting relationship has been established and so they will not be identified at the time of joining a scheme.

- Service users can need some time to reflect on past events and develop greater understanding of their situation

*As one worker commented: 'If you're actually developing a support plan ... that also depends on the insight that the client has into their problems.'*

- Gaps in communication

*For example, the full care history of a resident not coming to light because information was not passed from agencies in different local authority areas.*

- 5.9 There is further complexity in the assessment of need: when perceptions of need differ, whose perception is most accurate and should shape the support offered? This has implications for how and when support is offered, and whether the support is welcomed. As one worker summarized: *'I think one of the greatest stumbling blocks is this... dilemma between **offering** support, **wanting** support and **needing** support.'* This is a difficult issue. On the one hand, support relationships and input from workers need to be sensitive to the wishes and current understandings of the service user. On the other hand, there are users who are not in a position to reach a full understanding of their situation until they have received support, which at the time may not be quite so fully welcomed. Differing perceptions of the support needed can be a particularly acute problem to manage where the scheme determines that a certain level of support is required: participation in the relevant support processes then becomes part of the tenancy agreement, and non-participation a contractual issue.
- 5.10 A resident's need for support is rarely constant, nor can it be expected to gradually but progressively decrease. Peaks and troughs across time are to be expected and planned for. Support needs can increase suddenly during the course of the support relationship as a result of life events such as illness, the breakdown of a relationship or the birth of a baby. The nature of support can also change during a support relationship, with early inputs being focused upon emotional support and coping, for example, and later support moving to skills for independent living or participation in training or employment. Consequently the way support is provided must be flexible and sensitive to the current needs of the user.
- 5.11 Formal monitoring of need and outcome is considered to be good practice and was routine among the case studies (see Box 5.1 for an example of the usefulness of this activity). However, it is a complex process. Establishing systems that can satisfactorily capture both the multidimensional nature of service users' needs and the subtle qualitative changes in their capabilities and capacities is a challenge. It is also essential to be sensitive to the fact that apparent initial compliance on the part of a service user may mask disclosure of real needs and uncertainties about future goals. At initial assessment the service user may give the answers that they believe are required: only once the relationship with their worker begins to develop will they be willing to articulate their own views more directly. This was explicitly noted among case studies working with young mothers: for some, taking care of a new baby was in reality more of a short-term priority than engaging in education or training, despite

what was said initially. Engaging in education, training or employment were seen by some young parents as longer-term goals. However, there were some who wanted to stay at home to bring up their children themselves, seeing their role as that of full-time parent.

**Box 5.1 Monitoring activity, making the case**

One of the schemes for victims of domestic violence that maintained a detailed monitoring system had found that the evidence this produced had been vital in revealing gaps in service provision and supporting the case for new or extended services. The scheme monitors admissions and eventual progress of users through resettlement, the type of support given and where needs cannot be met. Information is also recorded on those who return to the refuge and the reasons for this, where accommodation is not suitable, and where referrals are made to drug and alcohol agencies. This is a long term process which is building up a picture of the extent of domestic violence and the problems and difficulties faced by families. The outputs were seen as immensely useful both to the scheme and the local authority.

- 5.12 For these reasons, formal monitoring is no substitute for getting to know service users over time in order to build up a realistic picture of their capacities and aspirations. As one worker noted:

*‘The key thing is to listen every single day. If somebody knocks on that door, you have to put your pen down and listen to what they’ve got to say, because they could go away and not tell you about it and it could be something really important’.*

## Access, application and assessment: Good practice points

- Good communication is vital during the access and application process. This has a number of aspects. Schemes should:
  - keep potential service users informed about how their applications are progressing.
  - prepare new users of accommodation-based schemes for their move into the scheme by providing advice and information about the moving process.
  - where possible involve key people in the discussion about moving into the scheme and assessment of need (family, partners, professionals as appropriate). Clearly, this must be handled sensitively depending upon the individual service user and the situation: discretion in handling referrals and sharing information is particularly important for victims of domestic violence, for example.
  - be clear to prospective service users regarding what is expected of them once they join a scheme (e.g. expectations about involvement in keyworking sessions) and, for accommodation-based schemes, expectations around group living. It can be appropriate to be explicit at this stage about the likely length of stay or support relationship, although this needs to be sensitive to a potential user's resilience in receiving this information. The user can then make an informed choice about entry.
- The application process itself should be as streamlined as possible. It may be upsetting for applicants to have to recount their story. This will be compounded if they are required to have two or more interviews with different agencies – for example the referring agency and the scheme – as part of the application process. Within the confines of relevant statutory responsibilities and data protection requirements, working to remove all unnecessary duplication is highly desirable.
- An initial needs assessment is likely to reveal only a partial picture of a service user's support needs. Ongoing monitoring processes need to be attuned to the gradual disclosure of needs. In this respect informal processes are likely to be as important as, if not more important than, formal monitoring systems.

# CHAPTER 6

## Providing support

### Key lessons

#### PROVIDING SUPPORT

- High quality, committed and skilled staff are at the heart of all successful and effective support provision.
- The support needed to assist users to independent living should be viewed as an integrated package. Safe supported housing, resettlement and floating support – together in some cases with helplines and longer-term support – are complementary. Not all users will need all these types of support, but a holistic approach requires considering them all.
- The journey to independence is not always a smooth progression in one direction. Support mechanisms need to respond flexibly to a user's changing needs and recognise that users may experience setbacks that mean a higher level of support is temporarily needed, but these should not be seen as failures.
- When designing and operating a support system attention needs to be paid to how intrusive users perceive it to be. This can be a key factor in determining whether support is taken up: systems perceived to be overly intrusive can meet with resistance. Individual procedures or rules may appear reasonable and justified but the aggregate effect may be an intrusive regime.
- There can be a gap between *providing* and *accepting* support. Service user engagement is important for maximising the positive outcomes from the support process.
- Users' awareness and acknowledgement of their need for support may develop over time. Some users may therefore appear to become more dependent before they can move towards genuine independence.
- It may only be once the support relationship has ended and a service user has gained a different perspective that they can fully appreciate the support received from a scheme.
- The financial status of users can impede effectiveness. The poverty level of some users is so severe that it significantly undermines efforts to instil faith in the system and encourage users to aspire to engage in other activities (e.g., education, training and vocational courses).

### **KEYWORKING AND INFORMAL SUPPORT IN ACCOMMODATION-BASED SCHEMES**

- The dominant practice is to structure support around keyworking. Keyworking processes vary in the degree to which they are formally structured. Sensitivity to the appropriate tone for such meetings is important for maximising participation. Structured mechanisms for keyworking may be necessary to ensure that users participate: without such mechanisms some will avoid sessions in order to avoid facing difficult issues.
- Good keyworking practice comprises regular sessions that are enforced as part of a tenancy, with the content explicitly negotiated with the service user and seen as specific and relevant.
- Keyworking sessions alone are unlikely to address all users' personal and emotional issues. Formal sessions should be seen as part of a structure of support that also includes informal contact which responds to need as it arises.

### **PEER SUPPORT AND GROUP LIVING IN ACCOMMODATION-BASED SCHEMES**

- Peer support can be a valuable element of an overall model of support. Schemes need to be clear on where they are striking the balance between formal support, informal support, peer support, and encouraging independence.
- Peer support networks do not necessarily develop organically. Schemes may have to run specific joint activities to encourage the development of positive peer relations.
- Peer influence is not always positive. Drug and alcohol schemes, in particular, need to make judgements about the tension between the positive support provided by groups and the possibility of negative influences if a member relapses.
- The *complexity* (eg issues of rivalry, competition etc) as well as the *value* of living in a group needs to be recognized.

### **EXTERNAL SUPPORT TO RESIDENTS OF ACCOMMODATION-BASED SCHEMES**

- Facilitating users in building positive informal networks of support is vital. These networks supplement formal support, and it is these networks that the user will draw on once they move on and their engagement with the scheme ends.
- Younger service users – particular young mothers – may turn to their families in times of greatest need. Schemes need to be flexible enough to accommodate absences which sometimes last several weeks.
- Yet, for young people schemes can also be a haven from dysfunctional families. Better relationships with parents and siblings often evolved once the young person is no longer living at home.
- Schemes for young parents did not usually involve the fathers of the babies or other significant family members in scheme activities. This seems a missed opportunity. The fathers' presence in a scheme can, however, be problematic. It needs managing with care.
- Drug and alcohol users may have deliberately cut themselves off from previous informal networks. Schemes need the resources to enable new networks to be built.

## Providing support

- 6.1 The model of support embedded in a supported housing scheme can vary across many dimensions. Box 6.1 sets out a checklist of the key questions to consider. These questions embody a number of tensions: for example, between fostering independence and encouraging peer support. Every scheme needs to resolve these tensions in practice, but it may not always be done consciously. Yet, the likelihood of a scheme moving rapidly to operating effectively is enhanced if there is a coherent view, during the planning stage, of how the scheme will address these topics.
- 6.2 While schemes need a clear vision of the model of support they wish to operate, all schemes find their activities subject to both financial and bureaucratic constraints which can have implications for the extent to which the model is realised in practice. Adaptation and compromise may be inevitable. That does not, however, reduce the need for clarity of purpose: it can be vital in arguing for and defending a scheme.
- 6.3 The model of support operated by the accommodation-based case study schemes typically had at its core a structure based around keyworking. Schemes evolved different ways of working outside of the formal keyworking session. At the broadest level their underlying objectives were also similar: one staff member summarized this as: '*providing information, removing barriers and motivating residents to do things*'.

6.4 However, while core features may be shared, schemes can situate themselves differently in relation to the delivery of services:

- Rather than providing services in-house, they can rely heavily on networking with other community resources and signposting their service users to them. One respondent neatly encapsulated this approach: '*Staff don't do it, we get the experts to do that – we feel we're the **access** experts*'.
- Schemes can make great efforts to tailor support to the residents' needs, by either providing services themselves or encouraging service providers to come on-site to work with the residents.

#### Box 6.1 Developing a model of support

Key questions that should be answered when developing a model of support include:

- How is independence to be understood? Is it a question of the skills to live independently? Or does it include changing aspirations or shaping life chances through encouraging participation in education or training?
- Where should the balance be struck between support and autonomy?
- To what extent should a scheme aim to provide support in-house or rely on other agencies?
- How should the balance be struck between individual and group support?
- How should formal and informal support interact and combine?
- What is the role of the peer group in providing support?
- Where relevant, should the potential contribution of partners and other family members be recognised and integrated into thinking about the model of support offered?
- What are the implications of the preferred model of support for the physical design of the scheme? If there is not complete freedom in determining the physical design, what implications does that have for the proposed model of support? Are the two compatible?
- For schemes for pregnant women, when is it appropriate to start building a relationship with the young woman – early in pregnancy or after the birth? For schemes for young families, where is the focus to be – the mother, the child, or, where relevant, the 'parenting couple'?

## SUPPORT VERSUS AUTONOMY

6.5 All schemes must strike the difficult balance between providing support and encouraging autonomy. This balance can be struck in very different places. It can be seen clearly in what residents can expect by way of 'hands on' formal and informal support during their stay in the scheme and in the way the scheme approaches the issue of moving on:

- *Informal support*: For example, schemes for young mothers can take a firm line that staff should never take responsibility for childcare or take the view that it is vital to demonstrate flexibility, with staff then happy to look after a crying baby for a while to let the mother have a bath or pop down the road to the corner shop.
- *Moving on*: It is possible to take the view that a fixed period – such as 12 months – is sufficient to ensure that a resident develops the autonomy necessary to leave a scheme. A longer stay would be a backwards step

potentially leading to dependency. This approach implies that residents need to move toward readiness to move-on at a certain speed – they are expected to conform to an external timetable. In contrast, schemes can shape the timescale for moving on around the individual user’s own pace of development and their feeling of readiness to make the transition. The former approach may be more appropriate where the key to living independently is believed to be the acquisition of skills. However, where other issues – such as emotional health barriers – must be addressed before users can consider independent living it may not be possible to work to a strict timetable. Similarly, adverse life events such as bereavement or the breakdown of a relationship can have a significant impact upon a resident’s progress to independence. Furthermore, the impact of changing life roles – for example, to motherhood – upon a resident’s capacity to move to independent living quickly can vary and cannot necessarily be predicted.

- 6.6 In practice, departure from a scheme is often contingent upon factors other than the residents’ readiness, such as local housing supply. This is a major issue in the overall effectiveness of a model of housing and support provision. We return to it in chapter 7.
- 6.7 Different residents start from different positions and will move toward independence at different speeds. Several residents we interviewed complained that staff did too much for them. The implication is clear: the residents viewed themselves as ready and able to act more autonomously. Staff should treat such views critically, but they should identify and accept when a resident is ready to move to the next stage and act to facilitate this move.

## A sense of home

- 6.8 Supported housing of the type provided by the case study schemes represents a stepping stone to independent living. The residents typically hold assured shorthold tenancies or licences and recognise that their stay is temporary. Most residents’ have their sights firmly set on moving on. An exception is where a scheme accommodates residents whose mental health is fragile: these residents may not fully appreciate that their residence is temporary – indeed in some cases raising the issue of moving on can cause distress.
- 6.9 Although most residents recognise their stay is temporary, supported housing is valued for its potential to provide residents with a secure and stable base from which to evaluate and rebuild their lives. Whether this potential is realised is influenced by the way the scheme is organised and operated. Several factors affect whether residents feel ‘at home’:
  - Rules about decorating and making changes to their flats/rooms
  - More general rules in operation
  - The insensitive use of communal space and facilities by staff
  - Combining the office base of the scheme workers with the residents’ home

- 6.10 Schemes need to think carefully about how they approach these issues to ensure that they do not inadvertently make residents feel unnecessarily unsettled. The alternative is to encounter residents who characterise their situation thus: *'you ... end up feeling a bit kind of like stuck in a hotel room. Like being in a chalet on holiday'*. Such feelings may lead to residents spending little time at the scheme or not feeling at ease when they are there. This in turn can undermine scheme objectives such as fostering peer support.

## **RULES AND REGULATIONS**

- 6.11 Schemes need to frame their rules and regulations carefully. And it is prudent to operate the regime with a degree of flexibility, but not so much as to render the rules meaningless. Too many rules and regulations, applied too strictly, will generally be resented. Practices perceived as unnecessarily intrusive can lead to residents acting to circumvent them. Whether a set of rules is experienced as oppressive will depend on residents' expectations and previous experiences – some young people may, for example, find even a relatively rule-bound regime less arduous than that operated by their parents.

- 6.12 Practices that are underpinned by good intentions and aimed at supporting residents may appear as intrusive surveillance from the residents' perspective. Schemes need to question themselves and be sure why they engage in such practices. Examples of activities that residents do not always receive positively include:

- Staff monitored letters that arrive

*This can create the suspicion that they are invading privacy. One young woman in a scheme operating this system had important letters sent to her grandmother's address as a consequence.*

- Staff entering flats without warning or invitation
- Asking personal questions about visitors

*This can be resented even when it is accepted that visitors had to be monitored to some extent.*

- 6.13 Residents are often, however, aware of the tension between privacy and support. They may not like being observed or having a file kept on them, but they do appreciate help with difficult issues such as benefits, where support may rely on information in the file that is being kept. They also often appreciate that rules they find personally irksome operate to protect their security when applied to others.

- 6.14 There are circumstances in which staff feel it necessary to evict users rapidly, both to protect other residents and maintain their own authority. Schemes encounter problems with anti-social or violent behaviour, neighbour nuisance or inappropriate visitors, for example. However, action to evict needs to be balanced against a willingness to give residents a second chance. The clearest example is where residents in schemes for those with alcohol or drug problems

infringe rules requiring abstinence and are given 28 days notice, but this is treated as a mechanism for the resident to reaffirm and prove their commitment to abstinence rather than automatically leading to eviction. The ability to respond with sensitivity to lapses or infringements of the rules was similarly identified as an important feature of providing support to young people at risk. There is a difficult balance to achieve here: schemes need to be flexible enough to respond to each situation individually and with sensitivity, while also needing to be seen to treat users impartially.

## How to offer support

- 6.15 The way support is provided is crucial to the way it is received by residents. At the broadest level this relates to differences in the overall ethos of schemes:
- Regular contact with residents can be maintained through internal management practices, such as reminding residents individually of meetings, checking in with residents first thing in the morning, being a central collection point for incoming mail and following up ongoing issues with residents. This approach can be found to be intrusive.
  - Alternatively a more hands-off reactive approach can be adopted, relying on an 'open door' policy and speaking to residents informally when, for instance, they pass the office. Residents of schemes of this type can perceive that they are required to do more for themselves, with the perception that the level of formal support is lower.
- 6.16 Residents' reception of the support offered is based upon the cumulative effect of a regime rather than on individual mechanisms or procedures. Individual procedures may appear reasonable and justified but the aggregate effect may be intrusive. When designing a model of support organisations need to be conscious of this aggregate effect.
- 6.17 It is possible to identify three broad mechanisms for providing support:
- formal one-to-one keyworking sessions
  - formal group sessions on- and off-site (such as workshops)
  - more opportunistic, informal methods (e.g. dropping into someone's flat to say hello)
- 6.18 More informal support can be unexpectedly successful because it flows from workers taking an interest in the welfare of the residents and valuing them as people, which is something that many users will not previously have experienced. Such informal support is seen as central to developing supportive, trusting relationships.
- 6.19 The provision of informal, opportunistic support can be facilitated by the design of a scheme. For example, locating a comfortable room next to the office allows residents to linger and chat with workers. Locating shared facilities such as the washing machine near the office allows residents to leave their flats ostensibly

to do their washing and then talk over a problem that had been troubling them. However, relying primarily on this type of support opens up the possibility of residents avoiding contact with staff, sometimes for considerable periods of time. Case study schemes tended to structure regular formal keyworking sessions into the support for all residents. Even if a resident does not wish to engage with staff informally it is not possible for them to disengage completely.

## **FORMAL KEYWORKING SESSIONS**

- 6.20 The keyworking system revolves around an initial assessment of need and the formulation of an action plan. Initially keyworking practices focus on immediate short term needs, but the plan should be kept under regular review. As short term goals are achieved emphasis can shift towards the longer term and, frequently, needs of a different type: a shift in emphasis from emotional to practical support is not uncommon.
- 6.21 Keyworking is appreciated by residents as a time to voice difficulties. Keyworkers are seen as particularly good at confidence and self-esteem building. But these are activities that require workers to have time to devote their attention to individuals: residents can tell when resources are stretched and workers are under time pressure.
- 6.22 While the dominant practice is to structure support around keyworking, the degree of formality with which keyworking is structured can vary. This can be a significant issue for residents who have been through the care system or other similar institutional process: formal meetings can feel like previous meetings with case workers that had been experienced as impersonal or disempowering. The approach to keyworking can also change over time within a single scheme, as illustrated in Box 6.2.
- 6.23 Attendance at keyworking sessions is expected, but not automatic. Some residents forget to attend. Others resist or avoid attending. This may be a result of a desire to avoid confronting difficult issues (e.g. the need to pay fines imposed by the scheme). Even residents who do not like keyworking sessions can recognise that they motivate to achieve things. Similarly, some service users who did not necessarily see the value of keyworking during their time at the scheme become more positive about the support they had received once they move on and gain a different perspective on what the scheme was trying to do.

### Box 6.2 Exploring approaches to keyworking

The structure of keyworking meetings is important in communicating and establishing their relevance to residents. The ADP Pilots experimented with the process in the following ways:

- One scheme tackled the problem of resistance to accepting help by re-naming keyworking sessions 'chat time' and leaving it up to the young women to schedule when, where and if the session took place. This scheme had a strong ethos of engaging *informally* with the residents as a group through social activities and communal participation both in residents' meetings and, at first, in the production of a magazine.
- Another scheme had discussed the issue of keyworking at a residents' meeting and had renamed the service 'One to One' at the residents' suggestion – implying a less authoritarian structure to the meeting, despite the fact that attendance was a non-negotiable part of the tenancy agreement.
- A third scheme moved away from a formal keyworking structure (timed, regular appointments) to a more informal approach (keyworking as and when), but residents did not like this. As a consequence the scheme moved back to a (more popular) formal approach.

- 6.24 Schemes may have to put in place mechanisms – such as making attending a certain proportion of sessions a condition of the tenancy – to ensure regular attendance at keyworking sessions. In these circumstances, schemes need to be very clear about how and when they will use sanctions for non-engagement. Yet, attendance is a necessary but not sufficient condition for effective support: there may be a gap between *providing* and *accepting* support. Residents' input and engagement is important for achieving good outcomes from the support process. Innovative approaches are needed which combine clear expectations of participation in keyworking sessions and negotiation with individuals and, where relevant, the resident group to ensure that the content of keyworking is relevant to their needs and circumstances.

### FORMAL GROUP LEARNING SESSIONS

- 6.25 Many models for supported housing supplement one-to-one support by scheme workers with externally provided training or information sessions. Whether these sessions take place on-site or residents are expected to travel to attend depends in part on the level of independence and engagement with the topic that can be assumed on the part of residents. In schemes for those in the initial stages of their transition to independence sessions are more typically provided on-site. Attendance at such sessions can be variable and staff may need to be active in encouraging participation. As one worker commented: '*We have to be as creative as possible ... we have to not nag people but we have to ... make people think that it's their idea, involve them in planning and feedback*'.
- 6.26 The content and delivery of training courses must be kept under review to ensure they are, and remain, effective. Schemes need to be sensitive to the way in which courses are being received by residents and be willing to change structure or content if necessary.

## TYPES OF SUPPORT PROVIDED BY THE SCHEME

6.27 Schemes can provide their residents with support addressing a wide range of issues. It falls under the broad headings:

- General life skills
- Emotional support
- Education, training and employment
- Support with parenting, where relevant

6.28 Support needs to be tailored to the needs of individual users. As a consequence, the emphasis of the support will differ:

- between users within schemes
- for specific users over time
- across vulnerable groups.

*There is a contrast in circumstances between, for example, a young person at risk who is coming to a scheme having recently left care or the parental home and a woman who is a victim of domestic violence leaving the family home. Many service users in the latter category possess key life skills that the young person, who has never had to live independently, may lack. That is not to say that victims of domestic violence require less support. On the contrary, it is a difference of emphasis, with intensive emotional support frequently required.*

6.29 The support from a scheme needs to be seen alongside more specific support from other agencies in areas such as substance dependency, counselling or assistance with mental health issues. The overall model of support depends on access to these complementary services. Where this proves difficult it will impair effectiveness. This underlines the importance of collaboration and joint working at all stages. Difficulties in accessing complementary services locally – particularly those associated with mental health – were reported by case study schemes working with young people, ex-offenders and those at risk of offending, and those with drug and alcohol problems. As a respondent at one drug and alcohol scheme commented ‘*sometimes the other bits of the safety net are not always in place*’. We considered the issue of joint working further in chapter 4.

## GENERAL LIFE SKILLS

6.30 Residents arrive at schemes with a different range of life skills, but the skills with which many need support include:

- Financial

*This includes developing budgeting skills, which is a topic that has to be handled sensitively and non-judgementally. It can also include help with transferring bills or accessing grants and benefits. Financial help is generally well received, although a minority of residents can feel that help with budgeting does not improve significantly their ability to manage their very limited incomes. Some residents also felt that because the scheme rent covered many of the expenses that they would have to deal with independently in their subsequent dwelling they were not fully prepared for the complexity of dealing with all the various utility companies and the council tax.*

- Liaison with official agencies

*While residents are encouraged to make contact themselves, they may need to learn effective ways of dealing with official agencies through watching and listening to a staff member making contact on their behalf. In some cases workers may also feel it appropriate to advocate on behalf of a resident. Advocacy is most fully developed among schemes for victims of domestic violence.*

- Finding information

*Scheme staff can be a source of information about college courses or training opportunities, given a context in which some residents may not be motivated to seek information further afield. As one young mother commented: 'I don't think I'd have bothered if I didn't live here.' Staff can be a useful source of information on other topics, such as benefits or issues around pregnancy. One reason they are valued in this respect is, because it is offered in the context of a relationship of trust, they can be seen as a source of reliable information.*

- Literacy

*Literacy was a problem for a minority of residents in the case study schemes.*

6.31 One of the objectives of the SCSHF and ADP pilot programme was the promotion of (a) healthy lifestyle(s). Some schemes offered support with general living skills such as cooking, but these were actively sought by relatively few residents. One problem with the promotion of this programme objective was that service users found it difficult to engage with advice on healthy eating when their financial circumstances meant they could not always implement the advice received.

## EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

- 6.32 While the case study schemes supported the SCSHF and ADP programme objective of enhancing service users' engagement in education, training or employment the emphasis they placed upon the issue differed:
- Some schemes for young people and ex-offenders made either active participation or a commitment to participate in some form of education or training a condition of entry to the scheme.
  - Other schemes took a more voluntaristic approach to education and training: a scheme might provide information and encouragement but did not place this at the centre of their activities and would not necessarily force the issue.
  - Some schemes viewed participation in formal education or employment as a longer-term objective to be addressed, possibly by others after the user had moved on from the scheme, once more immediate needs had been attended to.
- 6.33 It is vital to move towards formal education or training at a pace appropriate for each service user, some of whom may have had difficult previous experiences of formal education and may have disengaged completely from education: *'...they've got to want to do it, you can't push them into something they don't want to do'*.
- 6.34 To say that the pace of moving toward education or training should be appropriate to the residents does not mean it should necessarily be slow. Nor is it a recipe for an approach driven entirely by residents' expressed views and concerns. Schemes need to be sensitive to the source of residents' views and concerns and discern whether they signal a need for caution or whether support, encouragement – and possibly challenge – will move the resident to the next stage. Workers should be aware that challenging users' views may be beneficial, but there was a clear view from schemes for young people, including young mothers, that too much pressure can be counter-productive. It is not possible to force users to engage: schemes for teenage parents, for example, generally saw it as futile to try. In the extreme the user has the option to drop out completely. Conversely, pushing users into formal education or training too soon runs the risk of failure, which could undermine the more fundamental work that schemes were trying to build on.
- 6.35 Schemes need an approach that embodies a complex understanding of the psychological hurdles that may need to be overcome before formal learning could recommence: there may be a range of other support – such as building self-confidence or self-esteem – that residents need before they can contemplate returning to learning. It may be necessary to start by getting residents back into *thinking* about learning rather than engaged in learning itself. For example, a scheme may need to counter the frame of mind which says *'I don't need to do anything else now because I've had this baby'*. Schemes for those taking the first steps to address their drug or alcohol problems viewed formal education, training or employment as a longer-term objective. Their more immediate objective was to engage residents, who usually had rather chaotic lives, in some form of relatively informal but structured meaningful activity.

- 6.36 The aim of introducing residents to less formal opportunities to learn is to build confidence and to encourage further participation in skills-based learning through demonstrating its relevance and value. The next step might be an on-site workshop series that entails coming for sessions over an extended period such as eight weeks, or enrolling for something that doesn't seem quite like 'education' such as the Prince's Trust. Completing these types of activities will indicate that residents can manage their time and establish a routine, while also giving them a sense of having achieved something.
- 6.37 Achieving greater participation in education or employment can be made more challenging because residents often face a significant benefit or poverty trap. Users can also be concerned that greater participation in paid employment may render them ineligible for the support they currently receive. There are therefore important questions concerning the timing of increased participation in paid employment. Also, when a resident with young children is ready to return to education, training or employment the provision of good quality affordable childcare is crucial. This is an area in which considerable difficulties can be encountered, and access to childcare is an issue that it is essential to think about at the planning stage if scheme objectives are to be realised.<sup>5</sup>

## EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- 6.38 While emotional support may sometimes be difficult to articulate, it can be central to increasing service users' capabilities. As one woman who had experienced domestic violence stated: *'workers gave me the strength to go on, gave me ideas ... options ... they gave me the strength, that's what I want to say, they gave me the strength.'*
- 6.39 Providing emotional support is complex: some staff appear to have a particularly good record. The ability to relate flexibly – knowing how hard to push people – and reliably – following things through consistently – is particularly important.
- 6.40 Key aspects of emotional support provided by case study schemes include:
- Being positive with residents.
- This is extremely important. One worker summarized what works well as: 'Respect. Empowerment. Motivation. Don't tell them how bad they are and how bad they did it. Tell them how good they are, what they can achieve, what they have achieved.'*
- Allowing residents the space to disclose and discuss problems on their own terms and at their own pace.

<sup>5</sup> Our evaluation was largely conducted before the *Care to Learn* scheme for childcare support for under 19s undertaking any publicly funded learning came into operation. Our later rounds of interviews did, however, pick up on the availability of this funding. The *Care to Learn* scheme may well have a positive impact upon participation, although the issue of the relative location of provision needs to be borne in mind: whether childcare is located near a college or the scheme, or not conveniently situated for either, for example, will affect whether provision is available in practice to scheme residents.

- Mediating difficult family relationships.
  - Providing support at night, when users can feel particularly vulnerable.
- 6.41 Treating information sensitively is a vital part of all support relationships. This is particularly significant in relation to emotional support: residents may disclose very personal information and information relating issues or incidents that continue to cause distress. This information is offered on the basis of trust and staff must be sure to handle this information discreetly and, unless there are overriding reasons to the contrary, confidentially. Failure to do so can undermine trust and reduce the effectiveness of the support relationship.

## **SUPPORT WITH PARENTING**

- 6.42 Many residents of schemes for young mothers feel confident in their parenting skills, although some receive considerable support from their own parents. Support with parenting was not therefore a major component of the work of the schemes. Parents can also be key in supporting some mothers immediately after the baby had been born. Several mothers had gone to stay with parents after the birth and some had had parents staying with them at the scheme for a short while after leaving hospital. Schemes need to be flexible to accommodate these types of arrangement.
- 6.43 The safety of the children of service users is paramount and robust child protection procedures need to be in place. Child protection-related intervention is always very sensitive, but in supported housing schemes it has to be handled with particular care. Intervention can be seen by residents as in conflict with, or undermining of, the longer-term process of trust building, support and advocacy. An intervention with one parent can potentially undermine relationships between staff and other residents.

## Peer support and group living

- 6.44 A key benefit of being in a supported housing scheme is companionship – that of staff, other residents, or both. Developing the capacity to offer and profit from peer support is one advantage that accommodation-based schemes are seen as having over floating support schemes. Having said that, there may be good reasons for not encouraging peer support, for example, in a drug and alcohol scheme where there is concern that one person's relapse will impact on the progress of other service users. In these cases peer support would be better sought in outside services.
- 6.45 Thinking about how and to what extent a scheme will seek to foster peer support needs to be integrated into the overall model of support. For example, how does the encouragement of peer support mesh with 24-hour staff cover on-site? Could certain models of 24-hour staffing compromise residents' motivation to look to each other for support? In addition, physical design will influence the extent to which residents mix. As noted in chapter 3, adequate and appropriate communal space is particularly important. Hence, the role of peer support needs to feature in planning from the early stages.

- 6.46 Effective peer support networks do not necessarily develop organically. Schemes may need to start at the more fundamental level of assisting residents in learning to mix better with other people and tolerate difference before peer support can flourish.
- 6.47 The process of developing peer support can require managing through, for example, running joint activities to encourage the development of positive peer group relations. Activities can take the form of cooking meals together, social occasions and joint learning and discussion groups on-site. However, group cooking sessions run by case study schemes had a mixed reception. They can be a source of disagreement over participation, which reinforces the need for sensitive process management.
- 6.48 Group living can have negative as well as positive aspects. Social dynamics can be complicated: tensions and problems can arise. Case studies encountered difficulties between residents, but in most cases staff had taken an effective low key but proactive approach to mediation. Over the course of the evaluation the early reports of tensions in some schemes reduced. This was almost wholly connected with residents having learned to deal with the problems. Staff need to be aware of the dynamics of group living and act both to diffuse tensions and to facilitate this learning process. If proactive mediation is not sufficient to address the issues then this may raise questions about referrals and allocations policies: is the scheme trying to accommodate households who are in some way incompatible with each other or with the model of support being operated?

## **WORKING WITH FATHERS**

- 6.49 All schemes working with young mothers must decide how actively they are prepared to work with fathers. There is a continuum of engagement with fathers running from a position of no active engagement through to seeing it as part of the scheme's remit to work with both parents wherever possible. Work with fathers can be facilitated or hindered by physical design, and hence clarity on this issue is needed when planning the scheme. Rules regarding visiting and overnight stays also need careful consideration and management. Having men in communal living areas may cause difficulty, particularly when the scheme might also be housing women who don't want men around. Working with fathers can be in tension with other aspects of support. Encouraging active participation by men in the lives of residents or their child's care may not mesh well with seeking to build young women's self-esteem through group living and peer support.

## **Informal support from other sources**

- 6.50 Support provided by scheme staff needs to be embedded in an understanding of, and be complementary to, the other external sources of support upon which a resident can draw. Some of these are formal inputs from other agencies are an integral part of the model of support. Yet informal support from other sources can be equally significant. Younger residents, in particular, can draw support in the form of practical assistance, advice and emotional support from a range of family members including parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and

siblings. However, sensitivity to variations in residents' circumstances is vital: some residents' relationship with their families – particularly their parents – continues to be problematic or there is no contact.

- 6.51 Friends can also be a positive source of support for residents, especially during the daytime. Yet, there will be residents who are consciously trying to distance themselves from existing peer groups who are perceived to have a negative impact upon their lives. Again, sensitivity to variation is vital.
- 6.52 While informal support from external sources can be a valuable component of the support a resident receives during their stay at a scheme, staff are not always well attuned to the role that it plays. External support is, however, of great significance. Facilitating residents in building positive informal networks is vital: the ability to forge, and draw on, such networks can be key to a resident's effort to move on from the scheme and sustain independent living. Schemes need to recognise and support these networks (eg through informal participation in the scheme's activities) in order to build user's strengths in preparation for their exit. Doing so may have implications for both scheme design – adequate room sizes, for example – and rules – particularly those relating to visitors.

## Providing support: Good practice points

### THE NEED FOR CLARITY

- Be clear from the outset regarding the aims and objectives of a scheme and how these translate into a model of support that builds from a positive empowering philosophy. There are tensions – such as between building independence, providing 24 hour support and fostering peer support – that need to be managed consciously.

### A SENSE OF HOME

- Residents of supported housing schemes realise that they will only live in the scheme temporarily, but creating a sense of security and a feeling of belonging among the users can further the scheme's objectives. Two key factors over which care needs to be taken are:
  - how the scheme rules are designed
  - the way staff use the scheme facilities and shared space
- Well-intentioned rules can be perceived as oppressive by residents. Rules around visitors can be particularly problematic. Scheme staff need to be clear not only why each rule exists but also how the rules, both individually and taken as a whole, will be perceived by residents. Care is needed to avoid inadvertently creating a demanding regime that is resented.

- Even though often inadvertent, if staff do not respect scheme space as the residents' home then this can undermine the residents' sense of belonging. Attention is needed at both the level of planning and operational procedures to minimise this risk.

### **KEYWORKING IN ACCOMMODATION-BASED SCHEMES**

- User engagement is important for achieving positive outcomes from the support process. Innovative approaches may be needed to realise the full benefits of support. These can combine clear expectations of participation written into tenancy agreements with negotiation with individuals and, where relevant, the resident group as a whole.
- Make sure that the boundaries of confidentiality with regard to information sharing between staff in the scheme are negotiated with residents.
- Workers should pay attention to how intrusive support mechanisms are perceived to be because if they are perceived to be overly intrusive that can impede their effectiveness.
- The degree of structure and formality of keyworking sessions needs to be sensitive to the preferences, needs and prior experiences of the residents.
- Workers need to be constantly aware of where they are striking the balance between support and independence. Residents move toward independence at their own rate, relative to their needs: workers must be able and willing to facilitate their move forward.

### **INFORMAL SUPPORT, PEER SUPPORT AND GROUP LIVING**

- It is vital to understand the contribution that informal and peer support make to a model of support. The less formal components of support can require as much thought and management as formal keyworking.
- Workers need training that helps them to understand and contain the potentially volatile group dynamic within schemes in order to avoid the escalation of difficult situations.

**SUPPORT WITH RETURNING TO EDUCATION, TRAINING OR EMPLOYMENT**

- It is important to move towards engagement in education or employment at a speed appropriate to each resident.
  - Look for creative ways back into education for people whose educational experience and aspirations may have been disrupted. Informal activities and courses that don't feel like 'learning' can embed the idea that learning has relevance and value, as a prelude to introducing the possibility of a return to formal education.
  - Providing regular meaningful daytime activity that does not have the character of 'work' can be a first step in bringing some stability, structure and 'occupation' to those with particularly chaotic lives.

**ENCOURAGING EXTERNAL INFORMAL NETWORKS OF SUPPORT**

- Staff need to recognise, value and support residents' positive external support networks. They can not only play a valuable role in sustaining residents during their stay in the supported housing scheme but also provide a community to return to and a resource to draw on when the resident moves on and seeks to live independently.

## CHAPTER 7

# The transition to independent living

### Key lessons

- Shortages of appropriate local social rented tenancies for move-on accommodation create difficulties for accommodation-based schemes. Among the case study schemes delays in allocations were common, and were a major impediment to overall effectiveness. Users were remaining in the schemes longer than their support needs warranted. This creates a mismatch between local provision, those requiring support and those receiving services. This means poorer utilisation of the schemes because new residents, with higher support needs, cannot be accommodated.
- Not being able to ensure an appropriately timed and smoothly conducted move to suitable, more independent accommodation can start to undermine the work that schemes have done to build independence.
- The structure of the process for accessing move-on accommodation needs careful thought. Creative collaboration with the local housing department can be highly beneficial.
- The nature of the property that is offered as move-on accommodation can influence a service user's chances of making a success of living independently. Scheme staff may need to work on the residents' behalf to avoid the resident being rehoused in an unsuitable property.
- Many of the residents leaving the case study schemes had on-going support needs. Not all of these service users moved to accommodation where the appropriate level of floating support was known to be available. There is scope here for greater collaboration and co-ordination between service providers.

### Moving on

- 7.1 For accommodation-based support schemes to achieve maximum effectiveness it is important that they are integrated into wider structures of provision. Such integration would be most clearly demonstrated in ready availability of suitable accommodation for residents to move into when they are ready to make their next step towards independence. Yet, shortages of appropriate local social rented tenancies for move-on accommodation affected almost all case study

schemes. As a result residents often felt they were over-ready to move by the time they were allocated a tenancy. This is clear in the following views from one woman seeking refuge from domestic violence:

*'I've been sharing a small room with my two teenage children, one boy and one girl and with my younger boy in bunk beds for months. It isn't how I want to live, also it's not good having both the sexes and all the children in one room as they get older. I've had enough. It was nice at first. I really liked it, but now I've had enough. Can't wait to get out.'*

7.2 Delays in moving on can be the result of one or more factors including:

- An absolute shortage of accommodation
- Available accommodation only being available in undesirable locations
- Local policy not according overriding priority to the types of household accommodated by the SCSHF and ADP pilot schemes

*In this, supported housing can be a victim of its own success because schemes by definition work to reduce service users' level of vulnerability and hence can reduce their eligibility for move on accommodation. The need for stakeholder commitment to the model of support being operated, to minimise the risk of this situation arising, is vital.*

- Rent arrears caused by housing benefit errors or delays

*It is not uncommon for people with chaotic histories to have difficulty providing all the evidence necessary to support a claim, leading to a delay in processing and consequent arrears. Residents may make delayed claims, sometimes as a result of other significant life events: one teenage mother had built up arrears when a miscarriage was followed by delay in renewing a claim. The benefit system can have difficulty in ensuring continuity of assistance to those who move between benefits or move in and out of work, even when the correct information is provided when required. While in arrears, rehousing becomes more difficult.*

7.3 There is a limited amount that can be done about the first of these factors, although it was a serious issue for many case study schemes. The second may be a product of absolute shortage or policy and/or practice that leads to vulnerable households being offered less desirable properties. If the situation is the result of local policy then negotiation may lead to a change in priorities. It is likely that such negotiation would have to occur at a strategic level. Similarly, it may also be possible to identify mechanisms – such as the allocation or re-weighting of 'community care' points in allocations systems – that could address the third problem and bring about more rapid rehousing for households such as those accommodated by the case studies. One scheme had a specific agreement that the local housing office would view tenancies at the scheme as temporary housing, to preserve the homelessness status of residents during their stay at the supported housing scheme. Re-ordering local policy priorities or securing agreements of this type is again likely to require negotiation at strategic level. Greater emphasis upon assistance from scheme workers with

form filling may address the fourth issue, but it may be a symptom of broader problems with local systems and processes. If this is the case then there may be limited scope for action at scheme level to deal with the problem.

- 7.4 As noted in chapter 6, most tenants are aware from their time of entry into a scheme that their stay is temporary. Addressing the issue of moving on from the outset with each resident and re-visited it regularly during the resident's stay can be motivating. Residents can view moving into their own accommodation as a measure of their success in the scheme and a cause for pride. There is, however, a balance to be struck between recognising the prospect of moving on and allowing residents to feel settled and 'at home' in the scheme. In addition, in practice the decision about timing and readiness to move can be complex.
- 7.5 If residents are not aware that their residence is time-limited then this should be the product of conscious decision on the part of the scheme staff, rather than poor communication. In some cases it may be inappropriate to raise the issue of moving on at an early stage because the resident's fragile mental state means that to do so would be unnecessarily stressful and counter-productive. Only when the resident is sufficiently robust can the issue be broached constructively.

## THE PROCESS OF TRANSITION

- 7.6 The process of applying for move-on properties needs careful thought and structuring. The aim should be to avoid offers of accommodation arriving abruptly and requiring residents not only to respond rapidly but also to move with relatively little notice. It is unreasonable to expect residents to arrange to move in a few days without any notice. This is particularly the case for households including children, where a woman may already be trying to balance the competing priorities of childcare and participation in education or work. Collaboration with the organisation making the offer of future accommodation is paramount.
- 7.7 The broad alternative approaches to accessing move-on accommodation are:
- Residents applying for accommodation when they are ready to move on  
*The problem with this approach is that they will then have a period in the scheme when they do not feel they need to be there.*
  - Residents applying before they are ready to move, in the hope that when a vacancy arises they will be at the point that they are ready to move on  
*This approach raises questions about the emotional impact on residents and the possibility of being offered a property too soon.*
- 7.8 One of the ADP pilot schemes arrived at a novel way of dealing with the problems inherent in both these approaches (see Box 7.1).
- 7.9 Partnership with the Housing Department can be used creatively to ensure as smooth a transition as possible. For example, in one case study scheme there was an agreement that the keyworker would always attend when the tenancy

agreement for move-on accommodation was signed and the scheme undertook to support every young person for a minimum of one month after the move. In another scheme the keyworker would contact the Housing Department as soon as the scheme thought the young person was ready and the two agencies would work together to ensure continuity of support from both sides. There can also be a role for scheme workers, particularly where a one- or limited-offer policy is in operation locally, in negotiating with housing officers to ensure that they give reasonable offers.

#### **Box 7.1 Managing moving on**

Finding appropriate move-on accommodation for residents at the right time and in the right place was generally difficult. Having had some difficulties with residents remaining in the scheme for too long, the management team at one ADP pilot scheme approached their local authority to discuss options. They were able to negotiate a flexible arrangement whereby applications for rehousing would be submitted up to three months before it was anticipated that residents would be ready to move. In order to moderate the impact on residents of inappropriate early offers, it was agreed that offers would be channelled through the scheme manager, with opportunities to refuse offers which were unsuitable.

While this approach could help manage the stresses of moving on felt by residents, it raises some sensitive questions. First, there are issues of confidentiality and autonomy to be negotiated. Second, there is the important question of whether workers' understandings of 'readiness' to move correspond to those of residents – and, if there is a mismatch, how it should be handled.

- 7.10 While some residents will feel that they have the necessary skills to live independently, the process of moving on can be daunting for others. Schemes can provide practical support with the application process, identifying and viewing properties, getting ready for the move, changing utilities, or applying for grants and benefits. This practical support is typically delivered one-to-one by the keyworker, but alternative approaches can be effective in providing key elements of support. These include running weekly resettlement workshops to provide support on a collective basis or employing a dedicated resettlement worker. The latter strategy becomes feasible either when a scheme is operating at a scale to provide sufficient work for a dedicated worker, even when employed part-time, or through some form of co-operative arrangement through which the resettlement worker provides services to more than one scheme or organisation.
- 7.11 There is a difficult balance to be struck at this stage in the relationship between staff and resident. How much support is it appropriate for the staff to give to residents who are, by the very fact that they are in the process of exiting the scheme, considered to be ready for greater independence? It is difficult to resolve this to the satisfaction of every exiting resident: some will feel staff should have done more, fewer will feel that staff should have done less and let them work through the process on their own.
- 7.12 The quality and location of the accommodation to which the resident moves can have a major influence on their quality of life and their ability to establish a settled home in the short term. Ideally, the accommodation offered should be suited to the user's medium term as well as short term plans and needs so that they can settle in an area and not face the prospect of having to move again after a relatively short period.

- 7.13 Whether service users are able to access adequate accommodation, either acting alone or with assistance, depends in part on a combination of the resident's level of independence and the operation of policy. Policies on housing allocation are the most obviously relevant, but equally significant is rent policy and its interaction with means-tested benefits. The most vivid illustration of the issue from the case studies is a scheme for those with drug problems which found that the only affordable social rented accommodation being offered locally was on the estate with a strong drug culture from which the residents had moved in the first place: hence this broad local context did not support the work of the scheme. More generally, most users will find themselves moving to properties that are less well-appointed than the supported housing scheme that they are leaving – most will not, for example, own the furniture needed to fully furnish a property – and this can add to the difficulties of adjusting to independent living.

## After moving on

- 7.14 Many residents moving on from supported housing schemes require some ongoing support, at least in the early stages of living more independently. The following comment from a woman who had been a victim of domestic violence illustrates clearly why support is needed:

*'Even though I lived on my own for 14 years, prior to meeting my ex-partner, once you get with a partner for a while and then you move into a refuge, you've got this period of not being independent. You kind of lose it for a while. So when you do move into your own property, it can be quite a shock. Even though you've done it previously, because you're starting again. From scratch. And you do need that ongoing support for a while'*

- 7.15 Hence, when planning the transition to more independent living, alongside the identification of an appropriate property it is necessary to establish an appropriate support package. This can be made more complex if residents are moving across administrative boundaries. Typically such support is provided by a floating support service. When floating support is provided by the same organisation as the supported housing some of the impediments to continuity of support are removed. When floating support is provided by another agency, negotiations can be more complicated and there is an increased risk that adequate support is not available once the service user moves to their new accommodation. This was an area of weakness for some of the case study schemes, with users leaving the schemes without it being certain that appropriate resettlement support was available.
- 7.16 Other types of continuing contact with a scheme can act as a partial substitute for floating support. It can have a range of benefits for the ex-residents. Box 7.2 describes the experiences of ex-residents of one of the ADP pilots.

**Box 7.2 Keeping in touch**

Although one of the pilot schemes had no formal aftercare support for ex-residents, the young women who left the scheme stayed in touch and visited for birthday parties and other celebrations. This contact was encouraged by the circulation of a monthly newsletter from the scheme, keeping the ex-residents informed of what was going on. All the young women interviewed spontaneously mentioned the newsletter. One said '*it's nice not to be forgotten*'. Staying in informal contact meant that the scheme was seen as a resource and two of the young women said that they would phone the scheme if they had any queries or needed help in writing a letter – it was felt that there was help there in the background if it was needed. At the same scheme, one ex-resident had been asked to participate in organising a Black women's day by one of the workers at the scheme. The request was valued as a sign of her worth – that she was now seen as someone who had something to contribute.

## The transition to independent living: Good practice points

**MOVING ON**

- There needs to be a pro-active attempt by scheme staff and housing providers to deliver a co-ordinated service to ensure smooth and timely transitions into independent tenancies.
- Residents should be given reasonable notice of their move to more independent accommodation. Only giving short notice of vacancies can place residents under unnecessary pressure at a stressful time.
- Users should be clear regarding what the scheme workers will do in the process of securing move-on accommodation and what the scheme expects the users to do for themselves. Where the balance can be struck will depend on the stage the service user has reached in their move towards independence.

**FLOATING SUPPORT AND RESETTLEMENT**

- Provide the option of floating support after residents leave supported housing, particularly to assist with the initial phase of setting up a new home. Providing the service from within the scheme on a time-limited basis makes good use of existing trusting relationships during the period of transition when service users may be particularly vulnerable.
- Maintaining informal links after moving on offers the possibility of the scheme being used by ex-residents as a resource on an 'as needed' basis. This was highly valued.

## CHAPTER 8

# Providing floating support

### Key lessons

- While to the uninitiated floating support may appear a straightforward activity, effective working requires a complex range of skills and balancing of competing demands. The commitment, skills and attitude of the staff are at the centre of successful floating support.
- An organisation's experience and track record in running floating support schemes has a positive impact upon its ability to establish effective new services.
- Thorough risk assessment is important in all support relationships. It is particularly important for floating support, where workers may be putting themselves at greater personal risk by providing support outside of an office or managed residential environment.
- Taking account of the financial and time costs of travel is important in planning a floating support scheme, particularly in rural areas.
- It is typical, and good practice, to draw up a written contract or agreement with each service user when they start receiving floating support. Users commonly do not remember having such a contract or what it included. Contracts are often followed by the development of action plans or care plans. Action plans tend to be better understood and appreciated.
- While a flexible approach to support is desirable, it is important for it to be embedded in some structure and clarity of expectations about the type and extent of support available.
- Valuing the user as a person is fundamental to promoting emotional well-being. It is a foundation upon which confidence and self-esteem can be built.
- The ultimate goal for most people is to move to independence. The issue of ending the support relationship must be introduced sensitively, but it is important to be clear to users that their support is temporary. This minimizes the danger of creating dependence.
- Some users' move to independence is slow and faltering. They require periods of support beyond those that can be provided by schemes such as the case studies. Appropriate procedures for onward referral, ensuring continuity of support, therefore need to be in place.

- For some people independent living is only possible via the ongoing provision of services. Some floating support schemes are able to maintain people with very high levels of vulnerability and need, such as people with a dual diagnosis, in their own tenancies.
- In contrast, resettlement support may be established for users leaving accommodation-based schemes but they subsequently find that they are able to live more independently than expected and draw support from informal support networks.
- Making sure there is help upon which a user can draw after formal support has ended, should the need arise, provides reassurance. It can make a substantial contribution to users being able to cope with living independently.

## Setting up a floating support scheme

- 8.1 Floating support can be appropriate in a number of different circumstances. It is offered as a continuation of support received at an accommodation-based scheme to aid resettlement. It can be offered as support to those who are unable or unwilling to take a place in an accommodation-based support scheme. Or it can be offered to those whose needs can be appropriately addressed without accessing an accommodation-based scheme.
- 8.2 When a floating support scheme is being set up to assist resettlement thought needs to be given to the appropriate point at which the floating support worker makes contact with an exiting resident. When should they start building that relationship? There can be benefit in a period of overlap in the run up to a move, during which a resident is supported by both the scheme-based and floating support workers. This model was adopted by one case study in an attempt to ensure a smooth transition and continuity of support.
- 8.3 A support model based around floating support will typically rely upon service users accessing inputs from other agencies in the same way as an accommodation-based support scheme. Hence, effective joint working is vital.
- 8.4 Floating support may be cheaper to provide per capita than accommodation-based support, but it should not be viewed as support on the cheap. It needs to be appropriately resourced. The key variables in constructing a floating support service are the scale of operation and the assumptions about the staff-user ratio that is sustainable. Sustainable staff-user ratios in turn depend upon the users' level of need, the frequency and type of contact between workers and users, and the geography of the area in which the service is being provided. In particular, it is important to recognise the travel time -and cost – implications of operating in rural areas. Some of the case study floating support schemes indicated that they were operating with very low staff to user ratios (for example, 1 to 25). To provide an adequate service with ratios of this order requires that some of the users can be effectively supported through relatively limited worker input.

- 8.5 Many floating support schemes operate some version of a daytime office hours service. Whether this is the most appropriate arrangement depends on the nature of the service users and their level of need. For some users it is the reassurance of availability if any problems arise that is important: in our research some young people at risk particularly appreciated the worker *'always being there'* and *'making time'* for them – being prepared to have a chat if they were feeling down. The reassurance provided by *'[k]nowing that someone is there'* was particularly important out of hours. For example, one young woman had been involved in prolonged self-harming behaviour; she was particularly likely to harm herself late at night when she could not sleep. Being able to go to the hostel to talk to staff during the night helped reduce the inclination to self-harm, yet she was able to maintain her autonomy and to live independently. It may be that if the floating support scheme is part of a bigger organisation service users can have out of hours access to staff in related services such as a hostel or accommodation-based scheme, rather than running a 24 hour floating support service. The schemes can also promote reassurance through less a direct presence (see Box 8.1). Even though users receiving floating support may be progressing toward independence, their need for this type of out of hours support should be considered.

#### **Box 8.1** Providing security remotely

For women who are victims of domestic violence who decide to remain in their own homes, one floating support scheme funded the provision of a limited number of panic buttons for a period of up to 12 months. The system is linked directly to the local police and is designed to provide extra security for those who feel they may be subject to further attacks.

One case study had limited funding to subsidise access to a telephone landline and a telephone monitoring system similar to that provided in many parts of the country for older people. If the access button was pressed, the user has to give a password to confirm all is well. If the password is not given then the operator will alert appropriate contacts, using procedures prearranged with the service user. The service is initially provided for six months and then reviewed.

- 8.6 The intensity of the support relationship and its emotional impact upon support workers also needs to be appreciated. This should be recognised when determining sustainable caseloads for floating support workers.
- 8.7 Sufficient resources are not always available to provide floating support at a high enough intensity to support individuals with particularly high levels of need. This was noted in our case study research specifically in the context of schemes for those with drug and alcohol problems, where the alternative may be much more expensive residential facilities for treatment.

## The support relationship

- 8.8 The heart of a floating support service is the relationship between worker and service user. Ensuring continuity of support is therefore vital to achieving effective support for the continuing journey to independence.
- 8.9 The dominant factor in successful floating support provision is the commitment, skills and attitude of the staff. The key characteristics for a support

worker include being pro-active but not prescriptive; knowledgeable about local resources; empowering not patronizing; empathic and non-judgemental. As one interviewee working with users with drug and alcohol problems stated: *'I don't think it's a job that anybody can just go in and do'*. Workers need to be able to combine practical and emotional support, and be sensitive to the balance of support required by particular users at particular stages in the relationship.

- 8.10 A support contract can stipulate the timing and frequency of support meetings. The support available needs to be flexible: it should include a regular element – at a minimum at the beginning, so that a relationship can be established – but should also allow additional contact in cases of emergency and/or crises.
- 8.11 The scope for trying to enforce attendance and participation is rather more constrained with floating support than for accommodation-based schemes, where participation can be made a condition of the tenancy agreement. However, in practice experience differed: case study floating support schemes across the user groups, but particularly those for women fleeing domestic violence, did not encounter difficulties in engaging with users and users were glad of the support they received, while for others this proved more of a problem. Difficulties with participation could lead one to conclude that households deemed unlikely to engage with floating support would be better supported through the more structured regime of an accommodation-based scheme. Whether support is accommodation-based or on a floating basis, there are limits to what can be done to ensure engagement with keyworking. There may be additional arguments in favour of accommodation-based schemes: for example, the greater ability to monitor or provide support to high need users outside the keyworking relationship. Seeking to draw a general conclusion regarding the appropriateness of floating support or accommodation-based provision for households who appear disengaged would, however, be unwise: support delivery needs to be assessed on an individual basis.
- 8.12 Workers have to be conscious of the balance between dependency and independence. While remaining flexible in the face of crises, for example, workers need to manage users' expectations of the extent of the support that is available. This can be particularly important when a floating support scheme is acting to assist resettlement and receives users from a linked static scheme. In this situation the nature of the relationship between the organisation and the user is likely to change with the transition, and the level of support available is likely to be lower. This must be clear to users in order to avoid them feeling disappointed or cast adrift, and conversely it needs to be enforced so they are clear that they have 'moved on'.
- 8.13 The support relationship is typically based on an individually tailored action plan. This can be highly effective not only because it clarifies rights and responsibilities on both sides but also because it can be motivating for the user to map out and record their achievements. The stage at which action plans are introduced, and their scope, style and approach to monitoring, should be adapted to the needs and overall situation of the user.
- 8.14 In some circumstances, particularly providing floating support to victims of domestic violence, the use of written contracts and action plans needs to be handled with caution and discretion because the existence of the support

relationship may not be known to a partner, for example. Discovery of paper records could exacerbate problems.

- 8.15 Workers need to adopt a flexible approach. They need to work with each user to establish needs, offer information and explore options, and they need to respect the user's choices. A prescriptive approach should be avoided, but that does not mean that sometimes it is not necessary to challenge a user. Support workers can be too uncritical in their approach: we interviewed service users who felt that they would have benefited from a clearer challenge. The relationship needs to be one of trust, honesty and mutual respect.

## The dynamics of the support relationship

- 8.16 If the support relationship is not one of trust and honesty then this can be detrimental to effectiveness. Being sensitive to the fact that the support relationship is one that is influenced by the feelings of both worker and service user is also important. Concern about not upsetting staff or of losing access to support can lead to service users putting up with situations with which they were unhappy or not challenging inadequacies in the support they receive. One young person we interviewed would not complain about the lack of emotional support he received because he thought that the worker was a *'nice person'* and he did not want to cause any difficulties. Mechanisms through which users can raise concerns, without it necessarily implying blame being attached to the worker, are important. It is equally important to treat seriously any concerns raised in this way, rather than, for example, schemes responding that an unsatisfactory situation is not their fault but attributable to staff shortages or having new staff who are still learning the job.

## Building self-esteem

- 8.17 Valuing the user as a person is immensely important. Staff are often working with vulnerable people – such as those with drug or alcohol problems – who are more typically used to being treated poorly by others. Valuing the user is a fundamental element in promoting emotional well-being by encouraging people to value themselves and believe that they were capable of change, if this is what they want.
- 8.18 Workers need to be willing to act as an advocate if necessary, but also work with users to empower them to act as their own advocates, which is more effective and beneficial in the longer term. Building confidence and self-esteem is a crucial first step in this process. As users of schemes for victims of domestic violence commented: *'Having that person there for you makes you think you can do it'* ; *'It helped the process of me standing on my own two feet. I wouldn't be so confident, so strong in myself.'*

## Gaining independence, reducing support

- 8.19 The move to independence cannot be rushed. It can take a long time for users to gain or regain confidence and self-belief, to come to terms with their

situation and have the will to deal with it. And that may be only the first step on a long road towards independence.

- 8.20 While floating support should be oriented towards what the user requires, it is necessary to decide how structured the support will be. In particular, is support going to be consciously tapered in some way – for example, intensive support at first, followed by a progressive reduction of support to the point of, perhaps, access to telephone support only, before finally ceasing the formal support relationship? This type of staged withdrawal can work well.
- 8.21 If, as is common, a scheme is aiming to progressively reduce the support offered as the user moves towards independence then it is important to ensure that the user is clear what is happening, and over what timescale, and is comfortable with this. There is a danger that users may feel they have been ‘abandoned’ if support is decreased without a clear explanation as to why this is happening and when they will next see the worker. Users should be happy that the support is being withdrawn, but it is not always easy to determine that they have reached a stage when they feel they no longer need support.

## Ending the support relationship

- 8.22 The ultimate goal of floating support is for people to move to independence. Users should be clear that their support is temporary and will end at some point. Allowing users to think that support is indefinite may encourage dependency. However, the issue of ending the support relationship needs to be introduced sensitively to ensure that users are sufficiently robust to contemplate this situation.
- 8.23 Some users’ journey to independence requires longer-term assistance than was available through schemes such as the SCSHF, where support is time-limited by design. In such cases mechanisms for arranging onward referral and ensuring continuity of support are required. This was particularly relevant to those working with people with drug and alcohol problems. One worker in a scheme for users with particularly complex needs commented: *‘I would not envisage one of these individuals leaving us on floating support without still needing support’*. For some people independent living will only ever be possible with continuing support.
- 8.24 Determining whether it is an appropriate time for a support relationship to end can be complicated. Users may be reluctant to say that they no longer need support because, while they could cope without it at present, they think they might need support again in the future and they do not want to refuse support now only to need it again if they experience difficulties. In addition, users can be unwilling to say they no longer need support because they do not wish to upset the worker. It may occasionally be that the relationship is being continued for the apparent benefit of the worker, rather than the user. Workers need to be attuned to the dynamics of the relationship and to the user’s capabilities and autonomy – encouraging the user to take the next step toward independence even if they lack confidence. And the worker must be able to ‘let go’ when the time is right.

- 8.25 The availability of complementary low level services, such as those discussed in para 8.27, may ease the move beyond floating support.

## Floating support in context

- 8.26 The provision of floating support needs to be viewed in the context of other support available to service users who have moved on from accommodation-based support schemes. For some, floating support may be set up but little used – they discover they are better able to cope than anticipated. If a user is able to move on to a property near existing positive social networks then floating support may play a secondary role to support from other sources. One young mother commented on the contrast with living at the scheme:

*‘If you were unhappy and needed someone to talk to and needed just to get something off your chest, you could just talk to someone. And they were there and they listened. Now, when you’ve got a problem, it’s like “Mum, can I talk to you?”’*

## Beyond floating support

- 8.27 A number of case study schemes were able to take advantage, as and when required, of other services provided by the same organisation such as drop-in centres or telephone helplines. Schemes were willing to continue to support users in these and other ways should they, for example, face a crisis once they had moved to living independently. Ex-residents may never need to call on these resources, but their availability was felt by those schemes offering them to play an important role in reassuring vulnerable households that help was available if needed. This in itself could be sufficient to sustain them in their own homes, preventing the need for more intensive and costly intervention. The value of this type of support was highlighted by those providing schemes for victims of domestic violence. It was noted, however, that this type of support can be difficult to fund because, by its nature, it does not operate with a caseload as such and its effectiveness is difficult to demonstrate in the sort of quantitative terms that can be required by funders. It also needs careful consideration, if it is to be effective (see Box 8.2). This did not detract from the workers’ views that such support was extremely effective.

### **Box 8.2** The value of longer-term informal support

Women who have been victims of domestic violence may be reluctant to use drop-in centres based in ‘official’ premises, such as a Town Hall, or in makeshift accommodation with few facilities, such as church halls. For one case study, SCSHF funding had enabled them to set up a centre in good quality premises and a central location. The ‘drop-in’ operated once a week, facilitated by a support worker. The building is used by other organisations, which makes it easier for women and children to call in. Both residents and former residents are invited to attend, so that women currently in the refuge can gain from interacting with those who have already left and women who have already left can gain informal support from workers and other women. The group provides a child worker – a qualified and experienced woman who works with children, rather than a nursery nurse or a child minder – during the period the centre is open and other activities are provided in response to the suggestions and ideas of the women who use the centre. These may be educational, such as IT training, or craft and skill learning opportunities.

## Providing floating support: Good practice points

- Floating support needs to be based on a relationship of mutual respect. Effective support relies on the commitment, skills and attitude of the support worker. Appropriate qualifications and experience, knowledge and contacts all contribute to the effectiveness of a worker and the respect with which they are treated by users.
- It is vital to have an accurate appreciation of the needs of service users and the ability to respond flexibly. If a support scheme has more than one worker then an accurate appreciation of needs will allow service users to be matched to workers in a way that maximises the chance of establishing an effective relationship. Some workers may, for example, be stronger on providing practical than emotional support.
- Appropriate mechanisms should be in place to allow users to change worker if an effective relationship is not developing. If an initial support relationship has not worked well then it is even more important to listen to the views of the user in establishing an alternative arrangement.
- Service users changing keyworker because of staff departures or absence also need to be handled sensitively and the users' preferences should be a key factor.
- Clear mechanisms for gathering user views on the service are very important to floating support services because there are less frequent opportunities to interact with staff outside the formal support sessions than there are for residents of accommodation-based support schemes.
- Sensitivity to the social dynamics of the support relationship is vital to ensuring effective support.
- Users will move at different paces toward independence. Support workers need to have an accurate assessment of the user's capacity to live independently and to encourage and challenge them to take the next step when the time is right. Workers also need to be able to 'let go' of the relationship.
- Floating support is typically tapered off and then withdrawn. Tapering can be gradual or in stages. Tapering the support in a planned way ensures that autonomy is enhanced and an abrupt withdrawal is avoided. The process needs to be explicit and communicated clearly to the service user. The service user needs to understand and be comfortable with what is happening. The alternative is to risk the users feeling abandoned or cast adrift.
- If users know that complementary and related provision such as drop-in centres or telephone helplines is available, should it be required, then this can give reassurance and the confidence to move beyond floating support.

# CHAPTER 9

## Operational issues

### Key lessons

- All newly established services evolve over time and it is necessary to reflect actively upon and evaluate provision regularly in order to maximise learning. Workers need a willingness to make adjustments to practice as required.
- Learning is best achieved through a mixture of formal periodic review and continuous reflection on day to day experience.
- Engaging in consultation with users and stakeholders and receiving, and taking account of, more informal feedback on services enables adjustments to service provision to ensure that users' needs are being met effectively.
- Working within a stable broader organisational environment, or one in which change is handled with care, assists successful operation. Organisational restructuring can, and for some case studies did, suspend or interfere with service delivery.
- Quality staff are at the centre of effective support: schemes need to give attention to the way in which they support their own staff to handle the demands of support work. Staff support will assist in promoting staff well-being and retention, which in turn assists the effectiveness of the support relationship.

### The need for reflexive practice

9.1 It is important for schemes to take an active and reflexive approach to evaluating their services. This is particularly significant for newly-established schemes for which the understanding of the task and the context in which it is undertaken are likely to be evolving rapidly over time. This type of performance evaluation can lead to modification of:

- aims and objectives
- policies
- procedures

- the level of available resources
- the way in which existing resources are used.

9.2 Schemes should put in place at the earliest opportunity mechanisms for performance review. Formal procedures for regular review, via steering groups or through internal practices, are only part of the picture: in practice schemes need to keep activities under constant review through day to day contact with the users and, in accommodation-based schemes, through discussion with groups of residents at, for example, house meetings. An example of the type of change resulting from learning from experience is provided in Box 9.1.

**Box 9.1 Learning from experience, developing staff**

One of the accommodation-based schemes for young people at risk initially operated with support staff working from 8am to 8pm and sub-contracted a guard to provide security over night. However, it became clear that many of the anxieties and problems – such as self-harming behaviour – that the young people experienced were manifest during the night. This was the time that they could feel particularly lonely or depressed. The security guard was used informally by the young people to provide additional night support, through being there as ‘someone to talk to’.

The scheme’s manager recognised the importance of the role the security guard was playing, but also the difficulties that he could experience because he was not trained for a support role. She also recognised that the guard possessed potential and aptitude: following appropriate training and supervision, he could expand his role. She decided to recruit him to work directly for the project, providing him with training as a support worker. In this way the needs of the young people and of the person providing support at night could be met more successfully.

While this particular strategy for addressing the issue may be unusual, the case study highlights the importance of reflecting upon operational experience, thinking creatively and recognising the possibilities for staff and service development.

9.3 Areas in which the case study schemes demonstrated this sort of reflexive approach during the early months of operation typically related to specific incidents such as:

- complaints about anti social behaviour
- problems with specific visitors to the schemes
- incidents of violence
- child protection issues.

9.4 Most accommodation-based schemes will experience some difficulties with residents’ behaviour, although the extent of such difficulties will vary between schemes for different user groups. Among the case studies, a small number of schemes for young people at risk and for ex-offenders encountered some of the most extended or serious instances of difficulty. There were also incidents of violence and trouble being caused by visitors to accommodation-based schemes for young parents. In some cases the problems may involve disagreements within wider social networks, involving both residents and the local community. Conflicts within accommodation-based schemes are easier to handle than those

involving non-residents, as in the latter case there are more restricted opportunities for the scheme's workers to mediate.

- 9.5 Many of these occurrences are both emotionally and procedurally difficult for those involved. The incidents need to be proactively handled. But they should also be a trigger for the review of policies and internal procedures. Reflection on individual incidents can lead to major modifications such as revising allocations policy to change the profile of residents. This is not to say that the object is to seek to exclude all those with higher needs. Rather it is to ensure a clearer picture of the profile of users and how it is changing, the risks associated with particular users, and a clear appreciation of the types of user who can be supported effectively with the model of support being operated.
- 9.6 A range of other substantial changes were made by the case study schemes following reflection on events, feedback from residents, or, in some cases, opinion within the steering group (see Box 9.2). These include:
- Changing from operating on the basis of office hours cover plus on-call out of hours cover, to 24 hour on-site staffing;
  - Employing a half time resettlement worker to assist in the transition to independent tenancies;
  - Reconfiguring staff responsibilities to move away from relying on generalists and creating more specialist roles;
  - Reviewing staffing strategies in the light of staffing difficulties;
  - The introduction of overlapping day and night shifts;
  - New mechanisms for closer liaison between day and night staff, with handovers and 'incident' books being used to maintain the flow of information;
  - Reviewing procedures for handling confidential information;
  - Increasing out of hours security cover;
  - Becoming more involved with the service user before they move into the scheme;
  - Altering the way that training is delivered to enhance engagement;
  - Changing the structure of keyworking or resident meetings;
  - Reviewing 'curfew' rules when requested by residents.
- 9.7 Does this process of learning cease at the point when a scheme becomes well established – clear on what it is doing and how it is doing it? It is undesirable to think in these terms because it can lead to complacency. It is also unlikely that many schemes would ever find themselves in a position where learning ceases. The context in which they operate – in terms of policy, the profile of user needs,

available resources – will be changing continuously. As a consequence an openness to change and a drive towards improvement is essential to ensure that the model of support remains relevant and effective.

### Box 9.2 Responsiveness and change

One feature of many case study schemes was a willingness to change and, in particular, to respond to residents' preferences. As it was realised that something was no longer working, other ideas were tried out. One scheme had experienced some success with involving residents with training sessions in the past but realised that, over time, residents' preferences had changed. When residents told staff that the in-house sessions were not particularly welcomed, they switched to using outside providers at off-site venues. In another scheme, residents' reluctance to attend a local training facility led to a successful search for an alternative, more teen-oriented provider.

These schemes valued training highly as part of their overall support effort and they recognised that it was pointless to push something which users did not want. Responding to residents' views was a way of seeking to maximise effectiveness. In both cases the schemes were very willing to listen to residents, but they were equally clear that there were limits to the influence that residents could expect to have. It is important in any process of user involvement to ensure that the ground rules are clear to avoid users holding unrealistic expectations or becoming disillusioned with processes where they feel their views are not acted upon to the extent they might like them to be.

## Staffing

- 9.8 A relationship of trust between worker(s) and service user is central to support provision. The stability of having the same project worker facilitates continuity of service provision and a good working relationship with service users. This enhances effectiveness. However, staff changes are relatively common in supported housing and floating support schemes. This is in part because the short term or uncertain nature of funding underpinning many schemes translates into short-term contracts for staff. This militates against continuity of support to users and hence runs the risk of undermining the effectiveness of services.
- 9.9 Staff changes are relatively common, which can mean recruitment of additional staff, repeated staff changes or coping with staffing difficulties. All changes that affect frontline service provision need to be handled sensitively because too much change can undermine the effectiveness of support both directly, through the disruption to support provision, and indirectly because it can send out subtle messages about the scheme's attitude to its users.
- 9.10 It is important to have clear and agreed procedures for managing the rearrangement and reallocation of workloads. Where additional staff are recruited arrangements for managing those staff have to be developed, including how new staff fit within line management structures.

## Handling demanding work and coping with stress

- 9.11 Continuity of support is facilitated not only by low staff turnover but also by low rates of sickness absence. Support work is stressful and demanding. It is therefore important to create a working environment in which stress and the risk of burnout are managed and minimized. Many schemes achieved this – intentionally or unintentionally – by operating floating support in teams or by physically locating floating support workers with others working in related or complementary fields, with whom floating support workers can share experiences and from whom they can draw support. However, some floating support schemes operate on a small scale, with a single worker. Such workers lack peer support and run the risk of being isolated and suffering stress-related illness.

## Training

- 9.12 Staff for housing and support schemes are typically selected on the basis of the ‘best person for the job’, based on skills and experience. They need specific training tailored to their needs. This can include encouraging workers to work toward NVQ qualifications. Ongoing programmes of training and skills updating not only enhance organisational effectiveness but also raise the credibility of schemes with partner organisations from other sectors. Where staff are expected to provide residents with reliable information on a range of issues such as benefits or the local availability of services then there needs to be opportunity for regular updating of knowledge.
- 9.13 Schemes need to think through how access to training will interact with ongoing service provision, particularly in schemes where cover is permanently required. There is a danger that staff absence to attend training can place considerable burdens on those continuing to provide the service or, for small schemes, lead to breaks in coverage.
- 9.14 One issue of central importance upon which training may be necessary is the handling of confidential information. The support relationship is built on trust and this requires staff to show discretion and sensitivity in relation to confidential information that residents might share with them. It is not possible to guarantee total confidentiality – if the information shared gives rise to child protection concerns, for example, then this may require information to be passed on – but it is important to establish clear protocols regarding the use and dissemination of information and for staff to understand the significance of adhering to them. The consequence of not doing so is that residents do not trust the staff and are not willing to share information with them. This in turn can potentially impede support provision and meeting the residents’ needs.

## Administration and monitoring systems

- 9.15 The support relationship between worker and users is demanding. It is important therefore that organisations put in place administrative systems – record keeping and monitoring – that are effective and streamlined, thereby minimizing the additional burden placed on frontline staff. Robust administrative systems are particularly important for floating support schemes: staff absence, sickness or departure should not lead to major interruptions to communication with, or support for, service users.
- 9.16 Much of the support that is highly valued by the residents is informal. However, it is difficult for this type of support to be reflected adequately in monitoring systems, particularly those that are oriented toward quantification such as that associated with *Supporting People*.
- 9.17 For monitoring systems to be of maximum value in understanding organisational performance they must adequately capture the varying nature of support to an individual, and the flexible nature of the response required.

### **COST EFFECTIVENESS**

- 9.18 A major concern in the current policy climate, with its emphasis upon effective delivery mechanisms, is whether services are cost effective. Schemes can strengthen their claims for continued financial and policy support by being able to demonstrate that their services are cost effective. In order to construct a comprehensive picture of cost effectiveness information is required on:
- the outputs of a service (eg. the proportion of residents moving to a more independent living arrangement within an agreed timescale)
  - the outcomes of a service (eg. the number of these tenants that are able to sustain a more independent tenancy for six or twelve months after leaving supported housing)
  - the support inputs provided to service users (both by the agency providing the housing and support and other agencies providing more specialist inputs)
  - the costs associated with the support inputs.
- 9.19 Most schemes, certainly those who receive revenue funding from *Supporting People*, will have a system for monitoring inputs and outputs, although as we note above systems may not be flexible enough to capture the full range of either inputs or outputs. The measurement of outcomes – and their attribution to the support inputs of the scheme rather than other factors – tends to be less well developed. Leaving aside the more complex question of costing an overall model of support – which would take account of the full range of inputs from other agencies – unless a scheme is free-standing it can be difficult to identify the costs associated with it because organisations may not keep financial data at individual scheme level and, when they do, cost effectiveness calculations will

be influenced by the accounting conventions employed. While the task can require skills that are not typically seen as central to running support schemes, there is more that could be done to develop monitoring systems that allow a picture of cost effectiveness at scheme level to be constructed.

## THE RESOURCE COSTS

- 9.20 Maintaining detailed information systems may be seen as valuable in order to identify need, monitor and evaluate services, justify costs and plan for new services. However, pressure of work and a lack of resources can make the maintenance of comprehensive systems difficult to achieve. When designing systems it is important to be absolutely clear why specific pieces of information are being collected – no information should be collected ‘just in case’ – in order to minimise the administrative burden. The process of information collection should be as streamlined as possible. A comprehensive monitoring system is best sustained and maintained when, first, staff accept the value of collecting monitoring data and do not feel threatened by the process and, second, it is an integral part of everyday practice rather than being perceived as something that has to be done ‘on top of’ an already full workload.

### Operational issues: good practice points

#### SELF-EVALUATION AND MONITORING

- Schemes need to put in place effective formal and informal mechanisms for evaluating performance. Diverse aspects of scheme activities – both at the broad policy level and the detailed procedural level – may require modification in the light of experience.
- Self-evaluation is particularly significant for schemes in their early months, but with schemes that operate in a constantly changing environment the process of learning never stops.
- Monitoring systems need to be able to recognise the variability of the support required by residents, and capture the qualitative nature of much of this support.
- While comprehensive monitoring has a number of benefits, it absorbs resources and care needs to be taken to ensure that systems are as streamlined as possible and data collection needs to be integral to everyday practice rather than being perceived as an additional burden.

## EFFECTIVE WORKING

- Regular team meetings and staff supervision sessions can be particularly valuable in running an effective service. They allow workers to share issues and experiences, and to gain support from peers and management.
- Effective working requires that workers have sufficient time for training, updating and networking. This has implications for the size of their caseload.

## STAFFING

- Support work is demanding and stressful. Thought needs to be given to appropriate peer support mechanisms. This can be particularly important for floating support workers, who run a greater risk of being isolated.
- Where 24-hour staffing is part of the project's remit, specific attention needs to be given to the management of staff working unsocial hours.
- Staff working out of hours and overnight need to be clearly designated as having a *support* rather than a *security* function in order to attract and retain *Supporting People* funding.
- Yet, the contribution that staff focused primarily upon security can make to the scheme's operation over night should not be overlooked. Their presence offers service users someone to talk to when their keyworker is not available, and hence they may be a crucial resource. They should therefore benefit from training and support to ensure they are able to fulfil this function satisfactorily.
- Accommodation-based schemes need to consider the value of diversifying roles within the staff group. The specialist role of 'housing and re-settlement worker' can be particularly valuable.

## TRAINING

- Scheme staff need specific training tailored to their needs in order to both increase their professional competence and raise their credibility with inter-agency partners. Specific training in housing and re-settlement was seen as particularly helpful for those in accommodation-based schemes.
- The handling of confidential information is another area in which staff need access to, and to abide by, clear procedures.