

10 steps

to developing a Temporary Accommodation reduction plan

This document draws together best practice from a number of Local Authorities who have successfully developed plans which are proving to be effective in reducing the number of households living in temporary accommodation (TA). This paper aims to take you through 10 simple steps to developing management information which will form the basis of regular monitoring meetings. By following the simple steps below and adapting them to suit the specific circumstances in your authority, we hope you will find it relatively easy to develop this important monitoring tool.

Why have a temporary accommodation reduction action plan?

- As with any other improvement plan the reduction plan ensures that progress towards the target has been properly thought through and planned strategically.
- A well thought out plan can provide clear direction and targets to all staff whose work contributes to the reduction target.
- It is not just about numbers in TA. In highlighting a number of factors which contribute to numbers in TA the plan will help you to assess the success of prevention measures, homeless assessment processes, review processes, streamlining allocations and seeking private sector solutions.
- If you can demonstrate that you are keeping to the plan rather than just hoping for the best, you are more likely to be successful in your grant applications

Step 1:

Form a steering group

It makes sense for the people who contribute to the delivery of the target to be involved in both the development and the monitoring of the plan. The following staff as a minimum will need to be consulted, represented on and/or accountable to the steering group:

- A senior person who will drive the project (e.g. Housing Needs Manager)
- A manager dealing with placements into TA
- Homeless assessment manager
- Allocations manager
- Prevention and Options Manager
- The manager with responsibility for dealing with RSL nominations (if different from the above)
- The enabling manager where new development is significant
- Someone who will take responsibility for collating the data on a regular basis. An IT manager needs to be involved at the beginning of the project to ensure that all necessary reports are made available.
- Managers who oversee staff / organisations involved in running temporary accommodation schemes.

You may wish to involve all these people at the planning stage and reduce numbers to a core group once the plan has been fully established.

Step 2:

Establish accountabilities

The TA reduction target should be a corporate target and both Senior Management and Members should take an overview. You will need to agree how progress against the target will be monitored by Senior Management Team and Members, in what format and at what frequency.

Step 3:

Programme regular meetings

Ideally the group will meet on a monthly basis to review progress but this will depend on the ease with which data can be obtained and the numbers that must be reduced. Meetings should take place on at least a monthly basis so make sure that dates are in the diaries of everyone that needs to be involved.

Step 4:

Set up a planning day (or half day)

Arrange a set up meeting and call together all members of the team. Ensure that all necessary data is brought along to the meeting. This will include

- Performance information for prevention staff
- Performance information for assessment staff
- P1E data
- CLG tables setting out regional/national performance

- HSSA data
- Current assessment status of all households in TA
- A full description of TA units and any other relevant information e.g. type of accommodation and lease end information

The following information should be available for the last 3 quarters:

- Number of lettings to households in TA
- Numbers going into TA
- Total number of offers made by the authority
- Total number of nominations made by the authority
- Numbers of households receiving offer of Council accommodation in TA
- Numbers of households receiving offers of housing association in TA
- Numbers of households dropping off from TA
- Numbers of Households being evicted from TA
- Time waiting for an offer for accepted cases in TA

You may wish to appoint an external facilitator or perhaps even have a reciprocal arrangement with a neighbouring authority. Ensure that a suitable venue is identified with flip charts, pens, blue-tack, post-its and any other planning materials and make sure that refreshments are provided. Aim to have a workable plan on the table by the end of this session by following the steps below.

Step 5:

Assess Demand

Look at the P1E figures over the last year for acceptances. Hopefully the figures are going down and you can make a realistic estimate of future reductions based on past performance. It will be important to consider the impact of local and national trends on these figures and build them into projected figures.

In considering performance issues it may be helpful to know:

- What acceptances are as a percentage of all assessment decisions made?
- How long is it taking to assess cases?
- What percentage of cases are being placed in TA?
- Whether the figures are similar for all assessment officers?

There may be performance or training issues that need to be taken into account. How is this being managed through staff supervision and case load management? These are issues for the manager rather than the steering group but the steering group will need to be confident that management processes are in place. Average time taken to assess cases and average time taken to carry out reviews will have to be regularly reported to the Steering group so that this information can be built into the plan.

Step 6:

Assess the impact of Prevention

Survey returns from the national homelessness survey (Policy briefing 19) indicated that additional prevention activity was regarded as having the second highest impact on Temporary Accommodation reduction. It is therefore essential to monitor the numbers of reductions achieved through each prevention activity.

The survey is available on the CVLG website:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/homelessness/publications/abouthomelessness/homelessnesspolicybriefings/>

Survey returns indicated that additional prevention activity was regarded as having the second highest impact on Temporary Accommodation reduction. It is therefore essential that you have a handle on the numbers of reductions achieved through each prevention activity. A robust target (monthly/ weekly) should be set for each activity and delivery against each prevention activity can then be monitored as part of the process. Where there is a rent deposit or bond guarantee scheme in place only count cases where homelessness has been prevented. Estimate the likely impact of these measures on the number of acceptances and project a figure. The important thing to bear in mind here is that circumstances change over time e.g. mortgage repossessions may be more of an issue in future and it will be essential to track and respond to changing needs over time.

The P1E reasons for homelessness must be kept under review and you will need to assess which measures are having the greatest impact and track current trends. If a particular prevention activity is not impacting on the figures it is probably time to think about alternatives. Also look at how your authority compares to the regional average in terms of reasons for homelessness? If the percentage is higher than the region then there may be more you can do to target prevention to a particular group or issue e.g. young people, domestic violence, private sector evictions. If a particular measure is not working consider what might work as an alternative.

It should be possible to make an assessment of approximate numbers of acceptances based on the above. This is not an exact science, you will need to continue to review your estimate against the actual figure over time and may have to adjust the figures in future. The important thing is to be aware of the numbers and reasons for homelessness and be able to respond to any changes with appropriate prevention measures.

Step 7:

Assess the likely impact of diversionary measures

Set a target for Qualifying Offers, these may be made in partnership with RSLs or through your Rent Deposit Scheme. (See Jenkinsduval leaflet for more help here: <http://www.jenkinsduval.com/page8.html>)

Several authorities also offer a Finder Fee payments where applicants can seek their own accommodation and a one off payment is made to the landlord. Estimate the numbers that can be realistically achieved and factor these into the plan.

Step 8:

Establish which TA units will be reduced and when

You will need to map the current TA portfolio to establish which units will be decommissioned and when. There may be a variety of reasons why TA units cannot be reduced immediately. You may be locked into longer term PSL contracts or HALs agreements; you may depend on subsidy to fund your current service you may be using short life accommodation which could be at risk of vandalism if it is vacated. All of this needs to be thought through and appropriate assumptions built into the plan.

Step 9:

Assess the supply of affordable housing

Estimate the numbers of new lets each year between now and April 2010 and the percentage of available lettings to homeless applicants based on past performance and any corporate target that has been set. If there are plans to take handover of new properties these should also be taken into account in the figures. In considering the percentage of allocations to homeless households it is important to strike a balance if the percentage is too high this may result in more homelessness applications if it is too low, use of TA will increase.

If Choice Based Lettings are in place it will be important for the steering group to have an over-view of whether homeless households are bidding and whether offers have been made.

The National Homelessness Prevention Survey 2007 returns indicate that Local Authorities in England believe that improved RSL nominations are more likely to reduce numbers in temporary accommodation than anything else. It is therefore essential to make an estimate of RSL nominations and ensure that you receive your full entitlement from all RSLs in your area. In the interests of promoting sustainable communities RSLs should be re-housing roughly the same percentage of homeless applicants as the local authority.

Step 10:

Develop the written plan

You should write up your plan and distribute it to Senior Management Team Members and staff working in the homelessness service. Bids for

CLG grant will now be based on a three year period enabling authorities to produce a service plan based on guaranteed income over a three year period.

We have developed two spreadsheets to support this process which we hope will be of assistance and these are:

A management information tool

There are lots of ways of constructing a plan so we don't want to be too prescriptive. Issues which are important in one authority will be less so in another. The spreadsheet is intended to highlight important areas of management information which impact on the TA target to ensure that these are tracked and monitored on a regular basis. Only include the rows which are relevant to your authority. This information will inform the modelling tool and can provide ongoing information for discussion at steering group meetings. All prevention measures should be included on the sheet. (*Appendix A*)

A modelling tool

This is intended to enable authorities to track movement in and out of temporary accommodation. It can be used to model different scenarios over time. (*Appendix B*)

If you have any queries or additional suggestions please contact us at info@jenkinsduval.com or on 020 8870 4544.

We are happy to discuss the contents of this paper and provide any support your authority may need.

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