

Facing Reality

How providers of temporary supported housing can respond to the shortage of move-on accommodation

»»» www.yourmovenext.co.uk »»»

About the Move-on Alternatives Project

This paper is one of a series produced by Starfish Consulting for the Move-on Alternatives Project (MAP). MAP was initiated by Circle 33 Housing Trust in response to the lack of move-on accommodation from temporary supported housing available in London. Its aim is to find practical and collaborative solutions to the shortage by working with a range of providers and London boroughs.

The lead agencies are Circle 33 Housing Trust, Single Homeless Project, the London Borough of Camden, and Penrose Housing Association. However many other agencies have contributed to or have been involved in the work of the project. The work is funded by the Housing Corporation and the London Housing Foundation.

The first phase of the project (MAP1) has produced the ‘[your move next](#)’ website to enable service users to explore and pursue the move-on options available to them. A printed version is available to download for free.

Other papers in this series, which are also available from the website are:

- Models of Shared Living: the potential to develop unsupported shared housing for people leaving temporary supported housing
- Private Renting: maximising access to the private rented sector
- Strategic Moves: a framework for developing an area based move-on strategy.

The next phase of the project (MAP2) will focus on the development and piloting of a common approach to the allocation of social housing for move-on, across five London boroughs. MAP2 is due to start in the summer of 2003.

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Executive Summary

Providers of temporary supported housing are struggling to find sufficient move-on accommodation for their service users to move to when they no longer need the support on offer. The problem is particularly acute in areas of high housing demand like London.

Most projects were set up to cater for non-priority single homeless people, who would not ordinarily qualify for social housing from a local authority under the homelessness legislation. Despite this many projects have been able to negotiate quota arrangements with the local authority or local housing associations under which they are able to refer people for an offer of a social housing tenancy.

The common practice of allocating the social housing available for move-on on the basis of time spent waiting encourages service users to remain in the service until an offer of social housing is made, irrespective of whether they still need the support on offer there. In areas with a shortage of affordable housing, service users are often reluctant to consider alternatives to social housing.

As the availability of social housing for move-on has fallen over the years, the average length of stay has risen. Stays of five years or more in temporary supported housing are now common in London.

The current situation creates problems for both service users and providers. At present service users have little choice or flexibility over the move-on offers made to them, and risk institutionalisation or social exclusion as a result of long stays in temporary housing. For providers a continuing inability to achieve intended levels of throughput may put their future funding at risk.

There are a number of steps that providers can take to tackle the shortage of move-on:

Service review – Services in receipt of Supporting People funding will have their performance and value for money reviewed every three years. Providers of temporary supported housing should review their own performance in advance and identify what needs to be done to improve performance where required. For some this may involve a remodelling of the service to make it suitable for longer stays.

Creating alternative sources of move-on – Providers working in areas of high demand for housing are unlikely to be able to access sufficient social housing to meet the needs of all their service users, unless they are catering for priority homeless people. For most service users the realistic alternatives will be private renting or a move to an area of low demand. Providers need to ensure that they are able to

offer, or enable their service users to gain access to, the full range of support needed to help them access these alternatives.

Establishing criteria for social housing move-on - Whilst the social housing available for move-on is allocated on the basis of time spent waiting, some service users will continue to want to wait for their offer, long after their need for support has gone. To avoid this and to ensure that social housing is allocated to those who need it most, criteria need to be developed which clearly specify who will be eligible. Once criteria are established they can be used as the basis of a pooling arrangement in which service users are able to access social housing from a range of landlords. Such an arrangement will offer more choice and flexibility to service users by creating a greater pool of move-on offers to choose from. MAP 2 aims to provide a set of criteria but this is not likely to be available in the short term. In the interim providers need to specifically look at more effective ways to direct their allocation of social housing for move on to those most in need.

Sharing responsibility with service users – Frontline staff have highlighted the need to encourage service users to play a more active role in evaluating and pursuing the options available to them. Realistic information on the different options – including the likelihood of being able to access social housing – needs to be available to service users. The yourmovenext website has been developed to enable service users to explore a range of move-on options.

Creating more realistic expectations – Requiring service users to consider move-on options outside of social housing will involve a significant change of culture for many projects. Frontline staff will be crucial to achieving successful change and need to be trained and supported to deliver the new approach. Staff need to believe that realistic alternatives exist in order to convince service users of the same. Messages to service users need to be clear, consistent and reinforced at all suitable opportunities.

The second phase of the Move-on Alternatives Project (MAP2) aims to test out some of these ideas and provide more detailed guidance to providers. To learn more about MAP2, or to share your experiences or ideas, see the contacts page at the end of this paper.

1 Introduction

About this paper

This paper discusses ways for providers to respond to the current shortage of move-on accommodation from temporary supported housing. It is based upon ideas generated by the Steering Committee and Stakeholder Group for the Move-on Alternatives project and a series of workshops that have been held with front-line staff, providers and local authorities during 2002.

It discusses the nature of the current move-on shortage and the implications for providers and their service users. It then outlines a number of ways in which providers can respond. Although primarily written for providers of temporary supported housing, it should also be of interest to local authorities and Supporting People Commissioning Bodies.

The move-on shortage

Many temporary supported housing projects were founded on an assumption that social housing would be available to residents when they no longer needed the support on offer there.

Projects that work with people with priority needs - such as those found to be homeless under the homelessness legislation, rough sleepers or people assessed to be in need of care by social services – have access to social housing nominations via local authorities or the Rough Sleepers Initiative. However, most temporary supported housing was set up to cater for non-priority homeless people. For these projects, the expectation that social housing will be available to those who need to move-on is becoming increasingly unrealistic. The amount of social housing available in high demand areas such as London is falling (due to Right to Buy sales and other initiatives) at the same time that competition for it is increasing.

Little is known about the overall level of social housing in London made available to non-priority homeless people moving on from temporary supported housing, or how this is allocated between projects and individuals. Many providers have managed to negotiate small quotas of move-on from local authorities or the landlord housing associations with which they work in partnership – but these are rarely sufficient to meet all the move-on needs of projects. The increasing shortage of social housing in London has led to many of these quotas being progressively cut back. The HOMES move-on

scheme¹ has seen the supply of move-on accommodation from London authorities fall from 500 to 92 in the last six years.

Feedback from workshops carried out for the Move-on Alternatives project has confirmed that:

- move-on quotas are often allocated to projects as a result of historical links or relationships rather than strategic targeting;
- within projects, social housing is usually allocated between residents solely on the basis of the length of time that they have been waiting.

Implications of the shortage for service users

The allocation of move-on quotas according to historical ties results in a 'postcode lottery' for service users, in which ability to access social housing is more dependent on where they live than their needs relative to other residents.

Where providers have a quota for social housing move-on that is allocated on the basis of time spent waiting, service users have an incentive to remain in the temporary supported housing until they are made an offer – whether or not they still have a need for supported accommodation.

As competition for social housing increases and quotas for social housing move-on reduce, service users are spending longer periods of time in temporary housing in order to get their offer of a council or housing association flat. Feedback from frontline staff confirms that stays of 5 years or more are now common, despite the fact that most temporary projects were not set up or designed to cater for such long lengths of stay. There is a danger that protracted periods in temporary supported housing will institutionalise service users into 'hostel life' and make successful resettlement into independent accommodation harder in the longer term.

Current arrangements offer a lack of choice to service users. As most move-on quotas tend to be small and restricted to accommodation from one landlord, offers are dependent upon vacancies arising in that restricted pool of stock, which may not always be in the right location for a particular service user. For small temporary supported housing projects there can be problems ensuring that service users are ready to move-on at the time when an offer is made.

Feedback from local authorities suggests that, despite the shortage of social housing available for move-on, less than full take-up of move-on quotas is common. The lack of choice and flexibility in current

¹ More information on the move-on scheme can be obtained from HOMES (see contacts page)
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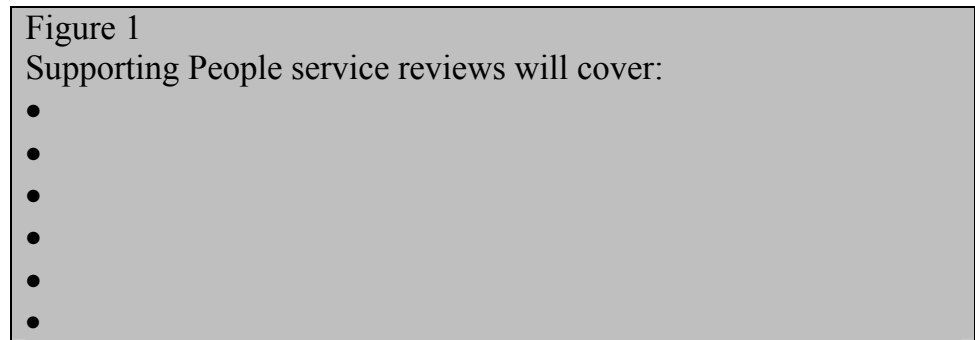
arrangements may be a major factor influencing this loss of move-on opportunities.

Implications of the shortage for providers

The move-on shortage has meant that many providers are failing to meet their aims. The Supporting People funding changes bring a new imperative for them to tackle this problem, as they have brought much greater interest in and scrutiny of supported housing at the local level. Under the changes, local authorities are responsible for funding and monitoring services which were previously funded from housing benefit and other statutory sources. Providers of temporary supported housing have a direct and contractual funding relationship with the local authority in whose area they operate, and will be subject to a performance and value for money review every three years or so.

Local authorities will administer Supporting People funding in accordance with local strategic needs and priorities, as agreed by the Supporting People Commissioning Body (which is made up of local authority housing and social services, health and probation). Funding for new services will be limited, and the Commissioning Body will want to ensure the most efficient use of resources in accordance with its priorities.

Providers who consistently fail to achieve intended throughput to their temporary supported housing projects, may not be seen to be offering value for money. As such they can reasonably expect to be subject to closer scrutiny, and may even risk a reduction or withdrawal of funding



2 Responding to the move-on shortage

Service review

In advance of the reviews that they will undergo within the first three years of Supporting People implementation, providers may want to review their own effectiveness in operating as a temporary project.

Where projects are aiming to provide short term accommodation, but are consistently failing to achieve that aim, due to a lack of move-on, they need to consider the options for change open to them. Those changes might be about increasing the project's ability to meet its existing aims and objectives, for instance by requiring service users to accept move-on from a wider range of sources. They might also involve more far-reaching changes to the very nature of the project, for instance a remodelling of the service to reflect its effective change to a medium stay project. Another paper in this series² considers the scope to remodel temporary supported housing to become low support or unsupported shared housing.

Although Supporting People may threaten the future of some services, it also provides opportunities for providers to work much more closely than before with local authorities to ensure that the best possible use is achieved from the revenue and capital resources invested in existing temporary supported housing projects.

Examples of questions that providers should address during a service review are set out in figure 2.

Figure 2

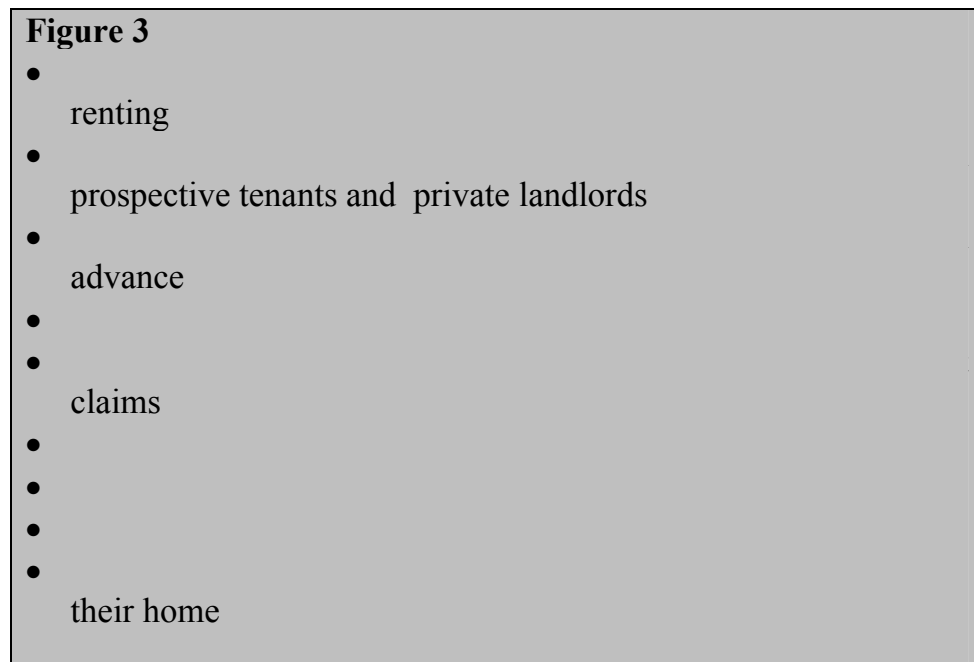
- How well is the service currently meeting its aims and objectives?
- What needs to change to enable the service to fully meet them?
- Is change of that type feasible?
- Is there scope to remodel the service to meet an alternative purpose?
- Is the building suitable for that alternative purpose?
- What funding is required and will it be available?

Creating access to alternative sources of move-on

With little prospect of increases to the amount of social housing being made available as move-on, providers must look to other alternative sources. As well as encouragement, service users will very often need support to access and maintain those alternatives. Another paper in this series has highlighted the barriers that

² Models of shared living: the scope to develop unsupported shared housing for people leaving temporary supported housing' MAP 2003 available from www.yourmovenext.co.uk
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currently restrict access to the private rented sector for people on low incomes or benefit – and describes a range of different initiatives that can be employed to tackle those barriers³. Research undertaken for that paper suggests that the most effective approaches are those that offer a range of support, including practical and financial help – as set out in figure 3.



For some people a move to an area out London may be a feasible option, especially if they have links with that area. Most London boroughs now operate schemes to enable households to move to areas outside London where there is relatively low demand for social housing, and local authorities and housing associations are willing to let homes to people from London. A range of support is usually available for households considering such a move, including help with travel costs and finding employment after the move. More information can be found in the ‘Outside London’ section of the [yourmovenext](http://www.yourmovenext.co.uk) website at www.yourmovenext.co.uk.

The Homelessness Act 2002 requires every local housing authority to develop a homelessness strategy for their area to prevent and respond to homelessness by 31 July 2003. These requirements bring with them a new emphasis on the prevention of homelessness and may herald a greater willingness amongst local authorities to fund initiatives to increase the range of move-on available, especially where they free up places in temporary supported housing for people with priority needs. Providers should now engage with their local authority to ensure that the shortage of move-on is specifically addressed by the strategy.

³ ‘Private Renting: maximising access to the private rented sector’ MAP 2003 available from www.yourmovenext.co.uk
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Establishing criteria for access to social housing

The Move-on Alternatives Project regards clarity about who will or won't be able to access social housing move-on to be an important part of encouraging service users to consider the other move-on options available to them.

The current system for allocating social housing as move-on is inequitable and leads to the inefficient use of temporary supported housing resources. Allocating social housing move-on to those who have been waiting longest for it encourages service users to remain in temporary supported housing beyond their need for support. By making it clear who will or won't be able to access social housing move-on, those who are ineligible will be encouraged to consider the other housing options which are available to them, and more timely throughput of residents can be achieved.

Frontline staff have expressed the view that a change to needs based criteria for allocating social housing move-on should be introduced for all services in an area simultaneously, to avoid service users simply targeting those projects that continue to offer open access to social housing move-on. Including all relevant agencies in the development of the criteria increases the likelihood that they will be widely adopted. MAP 2 will develop a model for achieving common criteria and produce good practice on how to involve all stakeholders within a local authority or across several local authority areas

As well as enabling a common approach to be adopted across providers, the development of criteria for allocating social housing move-on would also create an opportunity for social housing landlords to 'pool' the lettings available as move-on. Such a pooling arrangement would give greater choice and more timely move-on to those service users who are eligible for social housing. They would be more likely to get an offer when they need it, rather than having to wait for a vacancy from a particular landlord. There would also be greater opportunities to ensure that they can be housed in an area that is close to important support networks for them – both of which can be crucial to the achievement of lasting resettlement.

Figure 4

Potential benefits from a common allocations policy for social housing move-on:

- more timely move-on for those eligible for social housing
- greater choice for those eligible for social housing
- a more transparent and equitable approach
- greater willingness of residents to consider alternative sources of move-on

- more efficient use of temporary supported housing
- may encourage wider joint working across agencies and areas

Sharing responsibility with service users

Frontline staff have highlighted the need for service users to take more responsibility for their own rehousing. They want to shift the emphasis from service users waiting for the project to find their move-on for them, to one in which service users play an active role in evaluating and pursuing the options available.

The Move-on Alternatives Project has developed a website⁴ which enables service users to explore and pursue a range of move-on options for themselves, and which has been designed for use by first time website users. It is largely aimed at residents of temporary supported housing in London, but also covers housing options outside London. A printed version of the information on the website can be downloaded for free.

The website covers a range of move-on options as set out in figure 5 below. Whilst covering access to social housing and including valuable advice on how to increase the chances of a successful application, the website also tries to encourage realistic expectations amongst service users.

Figure 5

Housing Options covered by the 'yourmovenext' website

- renting from a private landlord
- flat sharing
- council or housing association accommodation
- low cost home ownership
- buying a home on the open market
- hostel accommodation
- moving out of London

www.yourmovenext.co.uk

Frontline staff have emphasised the need to combat some of the 'urban myths' that circulate amongst people using homelessness services - about the ease with which social housing will be available and the level of choice that they can expect. They suggest the use of publicity and peer education to inform service users about their realistic chances of getting social housing move-on.

Frontline staff have suggested that education should not only be targeted at those already living in temporary supported housing, but

⁴ www.yourmovenext.co.uk
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also at those at risk of homelessness. For those who may be considering a move to London or other high demand areas, this should set out the realistic chances of getting a social housing flat as a result of a stay in temporary supported housing as well as the 'grim realities' of hostel life.

Changing expectations

The Move-on Alternatives Project (MAP) has held a series of workshops with frontline staff working in the full range of temporary supported housing. These workshops have confirmed the problems that services are struggling with in relation to move-on and helped to generate ideas about how they can be tackled.

Key messages from those workshops are:

- the need to give more responsibility to service users for finding appropriate move-on (discussed in the previous section of this paper)
- the need to educate both staff and service users about the shortage of social housing
- the crucial importance of consistent messages to service users about the move-on options available to them.

Figure 6

Ideas for changing service users expectations:

- Make sure messages given to service users about move-on are consistent within and across agencies
- Set up inter-agency training to include those agencies that have first contact with service users e.g. outreach and housing advice agencies
- Give staff and service users facts and figures about the scale of the housing shortage
- Spell out what the service user can expect on move-on at application stage and reinforce this regularly thereafter e.g. through key working sessions and tenants' meetings
- Ask service users to sign to say that they understand their rights and responsibilities in relation to move-on at outset
- Use assured shorthold tenancies, as allowed by the Housing Corporation⁵
- Develop a clear policy line on how to deal with service users who refuse to pursue reasonable move-on offers and the circumstances in which they will be asked to leave
- Consider engineering a complete turnover of service users to ease the introduction of the new approach
- Use 'peer education' from those who have successfully moved to accommodation other than social housing to convince other service users to consider the same options.

Staff commitment to the new approach will be critical to its success. In the case study example below, it was seen to be vital for staff to be convinced of the realistic nature of other options before being able to encourage homeless people to look beyond social housing. This reinforces the need for projects to ensure that they are able to offer the advice and support needed by residents to access those other options.

The London Borough of Harrow has introduced a new approach to dealing with homelessness applications that stresses the limited capacity of the council to provide social housing and encourages applicants to consider a range of other options available to them. These include:

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Homeless applicants are told about the length of time they can expect to have to wait in temporary accommodation if accepted as homeless, and encouraged to consider other options that might deliver a higher standard of housing and lower rents.

⁵ Code of Practice on Tenure Page 8 'RSLs may grant assured shorthold tenancies to residents living in schemes which provide temporary or short stay accommodation...'
Housing Corporation 2002.

Help is not limited to those accepted as homeless, but offered to all applicants. Resources have been targeted on prevention and initiatives to increase access to a range of housing options. The help on offer from the council includes: advice and financial support to those wishing to explore a move outside London; cash incentives to those landlords willing to let their properties to households on housing benefit; mediation and counselling services.

One of the keys to success of the scheme has been the willingness of staff to implement the new approach. Their ability to 'sell' the other options is seen to be dependent upon them having confidence in them as genuine and realistic alternatives. Staff are fully briefed and trained on the messages they need to get across to applicants and these are reinforced and delivered consistently at all contact with service users. Seminars were held with voluntary sector bodies in the borough to explain the new approach to them.

3 Concluding remarks

This paper has suggested a number of ways in which providers can respond to the shortage of move-on accommodation.

We hope to secure funding for a further phase of the Move-on Alternatives Project (MAP2) to test out some of the ideas and provide more detailed guidance to providers. We would also like to hear about your experiences and ideas for tackling the shortage of move-on.

If you want to be kept up to date on the progress of MAP2 or have a contribution to make, please contact a member of the Steering Committee (see the contacts page) or visit the website at www.yourmovenext.co.uk.

Contacts

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Information about the HOMES move-on scheme can be obtained from:

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