

Models of shared living

The potential to develop unsupported shared housing for people leaving temporary supported housing

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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 available from temporary supported housing 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.

MAP has produced the 'yourmovenext' website to enable service users to explore and pursue the move-on options available to them. A printed version of the information on the website is available to download for free.

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

- Private Renting: maximising access to the private rented sector
- Facing reality: how providers of temporary supported housing can respond to the shortage of move-on accommodation
- Strategic Moves: a framework for developing a 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. Work on MAP2 is due to start in the summer of 2003.

We would like to thank those providers of unsupported/low support shared housing who supplied case study material for inclusion in this report:

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1 Executive Summary

The shortage of move-on available from temporary supported housing means that many residents are outstaying their need for specialised accommodation and support – in some cases by several years. This situation will be unsustainable under the new Supporting People funding arrangements, under which there will be much more scrutiny of service performance.

To tackle the move-on shortage effectively, providers need to encourage and support their service users to access a wider range of move-on accommodation. At present many residents expect to get a social housing flat when they leave, but the availability of social housing for move-on is decreasing year by year and in areas of high demand for social housing this can only be a realistic option for a minority.

In high cost areas, renting or buying a flat in the private sector is expensive. One way of cutting the costs of renting in the private sector is for several people to rent a flat or house together, thereby sharing the rent and bills. Flat or house sharing is common in London where it accounts for 12% of all households. Sharing is particularly common amongst those who are young or single, and people who are new to London.

Some providers are interested in developing shared housing as affordable move-on accommodation from temporary supported housing – with either a low support or unsupported management model. Accommodation suitable for letting as shared accommodation might be available from a range of sources including: social housing currently let as supported housing or general needs stock; properties owned by private landlords; and new developments with or without capital subsidy.

Discussions with existing providers of low support and unsupported shared housing have confirmed that there is demand for such housing, and have highlighted management practices that have an influence over the success, or otherwise, of such housing.

Sharing is not usually the first choice for most people, but more often a response to the lack of other affordable alternatives. Providers need to keep an eye on the overall housing market and ensure that they are able to sustain demand and compete on price and/or quality.

Sharing can bring an increased risk of neighbour disputes and additional maintenance costs due to high turnover. The costs of both need to be budgeted for realistically and actively managed. Both can be influenced by the management style adopted. For instance, encouraging sharers to tackle neighbour disputes themselves as soon as problems emerge can limit the need for expensive management input at a later stage.

Not all attempts to provide unsupported or low support shared housing have been successful. A willingness to depart from entirely needs based allocations systems in favour of arrangements that give more choice and responsibility to service users for making things work appears to be an important condition for success.

Examples of successful models of shared housing are described within the paper.

2. Introduction

2.1 Who is this paper for?

This paper is for housing associations, support providers and local authorities interested in developing additional sources of move-on accommodation for people living in temporary supported housing. It looks specifically at the role that unsupported or low support shared housing can play as a move-on option.

The paper considers whether there is a demand for unsupported or low support shared housing and how housing associations, support providers and local authorities can facilitate access to it. By drawing upon the experiences of providers already offering unsupported or low support shared housing, the paper identifies the key issues that need to be addressed by providers.

2.2 The move-on shortage

Most supported housing projects have been founded on the assumption that residents will stay for up to two years, after which they will move onto more independent accommodation. Most residents expect to be nominated to a council or housing association tenancy. In reality, sufficient move-on housing of this type is rarely available. The result is a backlog of residents waiting for an offer, often staying long after their need for supported has ended.

As the demand for social housing increases and supply decreases due to Right to Buy, the situation is getting worse, particularly in areas of high demand for housing. Stays of five years or more are now common in temporary supported housing in London.¹

The transfer of revenue funding to local authorities under the Supporting People programme will bring a new spotlight on the performance of temporary supported housing. Providers that want to increase throughput to their projects will need to help and encourage their residents to access a wider range of move-on options.

Home ownership is not a realistic option for most people leaving temporary supported housing, 95% of whom are on housing benefit². Even low cost home ownership schemes in London require a minimum annual income of around £20,000.

Affordability is also a major barrier to the private rented sector in London, as the average rent of a one bedroom flat in London is £200 a week³. Most private landlords require a month's rent as a deposit as well as another month's rent in advance.

2.3 Shared housing as a form of move-on

Sharing a rented flat is one of the ways in which housing costs can be reduced to affordable levels. Depending on the quality and location of the property, and the number of sharers, living in a shared household in London may reduce individual rents to anywhere between £50 to £100 a week in the private sector. Savings are also

¹ Based on feedback from frontline workers with a variety of London agencies, May 2002

² Core supported housing bulletin January 2001 National Housing Federation

³ Mind the gap: housing London's workers' London Housing Federation July 2001

made on bills (such as council tax, electricity, telephone line rental) which are shared between the different members of the household.

Sharing also offers other advantages such as companionship and social contact, and the ability to move into already furnished accommodation. These features can be particularly important for people who are relatively new to an area and not yet sure whether they want to settle there permanently.

Sharing is common in London, where 12% of households are flat or houseshares. For many people who want to live in London it is their only realistic option.

Flatsharing may not be an easy housing option for people leaving temporary supported housing to pursue for a variety of reasons. As for other forms of private renting, landlords and fellow sharers may be reluctant to take tenants on housing benefit – because of fears that they will become behind in the rent due to delays in benefit payments. They may also experience difficulties in providing the deposit and month's rent in advance usually required.

Sharing with a group of strangers can be daunting for anyone – and particularly so for those who have been living in supported housing. In private flatshares the landlord usually treats the household as a group, and has very little involvement in domestic arrangements. Tenants are left to agree or disagree about house rules, cleaning standards and division of bills. Moving from a situation in which the landlord makes all of these decisions (as in supported housing), to which in which they have to be collectively agreed by peers can be a particular challenge.

Agencies wishing to increase access to flat or houseshares can do so either by providing such accommodation themselves or by supporting people to access and make a success of them. This paper provides examples of providers who are successfully doing both.

The next section sets out the matters that providers need to consider before deciding to provide low support or unsupported shared housing directly.

3 Shared housing as a move-on option

3.1 Is there a demand?

People who live in shared housing do so for a variety of reasons. For many, shared housing is not their first housing choice, but the one which they can most easily afford. For this group of people demand can be variable according to the cost of the shared housing being offered relative to other housing options. The possibility of falling demand, and scope for alternative use therefore needs to be considered by potential providers.

Demand for good quality affordable shared housing is likely to be consistent in high cost areas such as London. However providers should still have regard to the comparative quality and price of competitors, particularly flat shares in the private sector. The willingness of social landlords (usually) to take tenants on housing benefit can be a major advantage, as many private landlords will not consider applicants on housing benefit.

Even in high demand areas like London, shared housing is likely to experience higher turnover than self-contained accommodation and providers need to budget for the additional void periods and management and maintenance costs that they will experience as a result.

As well as those who regard shared housing as a temporary housing option until they are able to afford alternatives, there will be others who regard it as a longer term option, either on the grounds of cost or because of the companionship and social contact which it can provide. Some providers allow existing tenants to 'trade up' to the more popular smaller properties as vacancies arise, and this can be an incentive to some for making sharing work.

Feedback from providers of supported housing suggests that 'choice' is an important consideration for those going into shared housing. People who go into private flatshares are able to decide for themselves who they live with. They will have their own views regarding who they might be compatible with. Providers who ignore the views of sharers on these matters risk high levels of disputes, high turnover of residents (and the associated void losses) and low demand.

Giving tenants control over who their fellow sharers are can be problematic for many social landlords, who usually allocate properties on the basis of housing need. Many of the providers featured in this paper do not have written criteria for allocating rooms between sharers but are guided by intuitive factors (about who is likely to get along together) and the expressed preferences of the sharers instead. This raises issues of equal opportunities, and a need for providers to ensure that choice does not directly or indirectly result in the exclusion of people from minority groups.

3.2 Is there a supply?

There are a number of potential sources of properties for use as shared housing as shown in the table below.

Private sector sources:

- ❑ properties leased from a private landlord and let and managed by a housing association (Private Sector Leasing - PSL)
- ❑ properties which remain in the ownership and management of a private landlord, which the landlord agrees to let to people leaving temporary supported housing (brokerage or matching)
- ❑ spare rooms in properties with a resident landlord (lodgings)

Social housing sources:

- ❑ existing council or housing association houses or flats of two bedrooms or more, which are unsuitable for families
- ❑ existing shared housing or hostels currently managed as supported housing
- ❑ new developments funded by social housing grant
- ❑ new developments funded without public subsidy.

The potential to use Private Sector Leasing (PSL) to develop move-on is discussed in another paper in this series⁴. Several associations already operate such schemes for homeless families, and there is some potential to extend their use to people leaving temporary supported housing.

The potential to broker access to private sector properties suitable for flatsharing or lodgings can be good, however this may differ across different areas. Although lodging schemes operate very successfully in some London boroughs, others have found a lack of interest from potential landlords. This can be the case when the households with spare rooms are the more affluent households that don't need the income that can be earned from renting them out.

Where private landlords are reluctant to take people on housing benefit, this can sometimes be overcome by combining the brokering scheme with rent guarantee schemes and fast track housing benefit arrangements with the local authority (see separate report in this series⁸).

The rising numbers of homeless families in London, mean that there is likely to be little scope to use family sized council or housing association properties as shared move-on accommodation. Many co-ops that have previously depended on this source are now experiencing a contraction in supply.

Existing supported housing is the other form of social housing which could be used to provide low or unsupported shared housing. It has the advantage that most of it was developed specifically to be used as shared housing. As Supporting People reviews take place, and local authorities seek funding for new developments from existing

⁴ Private Renting: maximising access to the private rented sector' Move-on Alternatives Project 2003 available from www.yourmovenext.co.uk

resources, funding for some of these schemes may be reduced or withdrawn. Some of these schemes may therefore become available for alternative uses. In other cases, providers may directly seek opportunities to remodel their existing shared supported housing. The agreement of the local authority (and Housing Corporation if it was the capital funder) will usually be required for such changes.

The ability to attract Social Housing Grant for new unsupported shared housing will be dependent on local authority support. Before supporting capital bids for this purpose, local authorities are likely to want to be convinced that existing shared supported housing could not be remodelled for this purpose.

Organisations developing accommodation for key workers often do so without public subsidy, and achieve this by producing large scale developments using standard build types and tight management arrangements. Such large scale developments may be considered unsuitable if let to concentrations of people who have left supported housing. However there may be scope to adapt the development and management models used for key worker and student accommodation, to produce smaller scale developments which require relatively low levels of capital or revenue subsidy.

Further work is required to determine the required staffing levels for unsupported shared housing, and what this means for operational costs and charges. If a need for revenue subsidy arises, the willingness of the Supporting People commissioning body to commit funding for that purpose will need to be carefully explored.

3.3 Assessing the risks

One of the main risks associated with unsupported shared housing is that of sustaining demand, although this will vary in different areas. Careful research should be carried out into local demand before embarking on new developments of this type and, where possible, there should be potential alternative uses for the accommodation.

Although shared housing is usually cheaper to provide in capital funding terms than self-contained housing, it can have higher running costs per tenant. This is largely due to its temporary nature and the close proximity in which people are living. As this is unlikely to be a permanent form of housing for most people, there will be a greater throughput of tenants. This is likely to lead to higher voids levels and a need to devote more resources to lettings. To make the accommodation appealing to potential tenants it may need to be furnished and there is likely to be higher levels of wear and tear than in permanent accommodation. Maintenance budgets need to allow for these additional costs. Finally, there is likely to be a greater incidence of neighbour disputes which can take up significant amounts of management time, if allowed to do so.

Staffing levels and budgets need to be realistic. Getting these wrong can mean that the service degenerates into one which is not attractive to potential residents (for instance if there are insufficient resources to maintain reasonable levels of decoration and repair), or that expenditure rises to unacceptable levels and the service becomes unviable.

To be viable without revenue subsidy, the service will need to be carefully designed to minimise management and maintenance costs. Just as important as physical design will be the way in which the service is managed and who it accepts as residents. For some providers this may mean moving away from established models of working and

the adoption of a new management culture. These matters are discussed in section 2.4 below.

There are also particular risks associated with different procurement methods, and these have been assessed below:

Source	Risk grading	Comments
Private sector leasing	High	The need to enter into leases of 2-3 years with landlords, combined with the need to use assured shorthold tenancies (which give minimum security of 6 months), creates considerable risk of voids at the end of lease terms.
Private sector brokerage or lodgings schemes	Low	Market analysis will be required to establish the likely scale of demand and supply in a local area. This can be a low cost/low risk means of enabling people to access shared housing in the private sector.
Council or HA family sized stock	Low/ Medium	Risks rise to medium if the agency leases the properties. The need to hand back properties may result in a need for evictions unless alternative properties can be found. There are risks of void losses at the end of leases as for PSL, but lease costs tend to be much lower.
Existing supported housing	Low/ Medium	The change to an unsupported or low support model may be difficult to make for some agencies. The change will result in a loss of Supporting People grant which may be difficult to reinstate at a later date. If revenue funding is required, the level of risk will depend on the willingness of the SP commissioning body to commit to the new service.
New developments using SHG	Low/ Medium	Risks rise to medium if the design is of a specialist nature which has limited alternative uses. In low cost areas outside of London the risks may be higher (as competition with the private sector will be fiercer).
New developments without capital subsidy	Medium/ High	Risks are high if the design is of a type not readily used for alternative purposes or general letting. In low cost areas outside of London the risks will be higher (as competition with the private sector will be fiercer).

3.4 Operational matters

This paper includes examples of successful models of unsupported or low support shared housing. However there are also many other examples of where housing associations have tried to offer shared housing on a low or unsupported basis unsuccessfully.

It is possible that some failures may have been due to the tendency for housing associations to try to manage such stock in the same way as their other social housing stock, rather than use a model more closely related to the conditions that apply to flat or house shares arranged privately. For instance, some providers may have attempted to apply a strictly needs based allocation process when letting rooms. Based on the feedback from the successful projects featured here, such an approach is likely to reduce demand and create increased disputes, turnover and voids.

In some forms of shared housing provided by housing associations it is also possible that tenants themselves may have expected a much more supportive and/or interventionist style of management, especially if they moved into the scheme from a supported housing project run by the same provider.

Further work is needed to properly understand the reasons for failures, but it is likely that some of these operational difficulties will be easier to tackle if the shared housing is managed by a separate organisation from the referring project, or at the very least a separate team, preferably with staff from a non-supported housing background.

Some suggested tips, taken from the projects featured in this paper, are listed below

Service description	As well as good practice requirement, a clear service description can be a valuable tool for ensuring that both staff and residents are clear about what the service will or won't provide. In particular, clarity will be required about the provider's ability to offer any help with follow on housing once people want to leave.
Delivering choice	Commitment and contentment can be increased, and turnover and neighbour disputes reduced, by giving sharers reasonable choice over who they live with and how they live.
Allocations	Alongside housing need the compatibility of sharers should be taken into account when allocating rooms. Responding to the needs and wishes of both new and existing sharers is important, particularly in smaller non-hostel shared housing.
Interviewing skills	Assessing compatibility is an art, rather than a science. A detailed interview schedule can help. Some trial and error may be inevitable at the outset. Reasons for particular decisions should always be recorded, and interviewing records monitored as part of staff support and supervision.
Lettings criteria	If a service is designed and funded to cater for people with little or no support then the criteria for letting places in that service have to enable staff to identify who the service can or can't cater for. Arrangements should be set up to refer people with support needs onto more suitable accommodation.
Tenant induction	The rights and responsibilities of sharers should be explained in detail out the outset. It may be helpful for established tenants to act as mentors for new tenants.
Tenure	Assured shorthold tenancies (ASTs) are likely to be the most appropriate tenure as they enable the landlord to evict tenants with notice after the first 6 months of the letting. This is likely to be very important as delays in evicting individuals from shared housing can lead to an inability to let the remaining rooms. The Housing Corporation has approved the use of ASTs in temporary housing.
Neighbour disputes	Sharers should be encouraged to talk about and solve any disputes themselves. Staff should normally only become involved when this has been tried and failed
Mediation	It is likely to be helpful for staff, and any 'responsible' tenants, to be trained in mediation techniques.
House rules	House rules can be a useful backstop, but may be too inflexible if enforced rigidly. Some providers think that allowing sharers to agree their own house rules can create greater ownership and allows accommodation of a variety of different lifestyles.
Tenancy enforcement	Where there has been a serious breach of the tenancy agreement, there should be clear policies and procedures for responding which are followed in practice. Failure to respond promptly to arrears or anti-social behaviour may threaten the viability of the service.

Transfers	The ability to trade up to better properties e.g. a larger room or smaller flat share, can be a powerful incentive for people to make sharing work
Equal opportunities	There should be monitoring of applications and lettings (including transfers) to ensure that the allocations process does not lead to direct or indirect discrimination. Exit interviews and monitoring can help to identify if the service is successfully catering for people from diverse backgrounds.
Support	There should be arrangements in place (preferably with outside agencies or teams) to ensure that the support needs of individuals can be met where necessary (but see Lettings Criteria above).
User feedback	Gathering user feedback on a regular basis can help to ensure that the service remains relevant and in demand.
Monitoring & review	There should be regular monitoring of key aspects of performance (e.g. lettings, evictions, tenant satisfaction, voids, value for money) and periodic reviews of the service.

3.5 Conclusions

There is clearly scope for unsupported shared housing options to be more widely developed and used as a move-on option for people leaving temporary supported housing – particularly in London. Although unlikely to be the first choice of most people in temporary supported housing, it can offer important advantages over other options in terms of cost and opportunities for social contact and companionship.

Continuing demand has to be carefully considered, and the risks associated with a decline in demand should be addressed both in the design of the accommodation and the management model. Turnover will be higher than in general needs housing and budgets need to include realistic costs for voids, management input and maintenance to reflect this.

The accommodation and services provided must be attractive to potential tenants. This may depend on the extent to which supported housing providers encourage realistic expectations about what type of move-on their residents can reasonably expect. Another report in this series considers ways in which supported housing providers can encourage service users to become more realistic about the move-on options open to them⁵.

There are a number of common themes emerging from the experiences of shared housing providers interviewed for this report, around how unsupported or low support shared housing needs to be managed and let, if it is to be successful. The changes in expectations and culture required apply to providers just as much as to tenants. Achieving this may depend upon the service being clearly separated from supported housing within an organisation - both in policy and operational terms. Without this there is a danger that services will be set up with lower levels of staffing and funding, without a corresponding change in the support needs and demands of the tenants being catered for.

⁵ ‘Facing reality: how providers of temporary supported housing can respond to the shortage of move-on accommodation’ The Move-on Alternatives Project 2003, available from www.yourmovenext.co.uk.

4. Examples of low support or unsupported shared housing

4.1 Privately arranged flat shares

Around 12% (368,000) of London's households are some form of flat or house share. An analysis of the Capital flatshare list revealed rents for rooms ranging from £60 to £200 a week, with an average of around £95.

Most people arrange flat or house shares themselves, by getting together a group or friends or by answering adverts for vacant rooms in existing flatshares. A survey of a sample of letting agencies in London revealed no evidence of them taking a significant role in initiating flat sharing arrangements. However several mentioned that many of the properties that they let and/or manage are occupied by groups of friends living on a shared basis.

When flats are let in this way through a private letting agent, the usual form of tenure is an assured shorthold tenancy with all the names of the flat sharers on it. This makes each one individually liable for the whole of the rent on the flat and any arrears that build up.

4.2 Co-ops

Co-ops have a long history of providing shared housing, and as such provide access to affordable housing for many single people. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most people in shared housing managed by co-ops tend to be young and single, perhaps relatively new to London or not yet sure where they want to settle down. Although some people continue to live in shared households for many years, many leave when they meet a partner they want to live with.

Not all co-ops consider their shared housing to be a success. Some have been discouraged by voids losses due to high turnover and/or lack of demand for shared living. Others may experience problems due to the design, quality or size of the property which they are trying to let as a shared household. The design of the property needs to be suitable for a multi-person household (for instance, have enough bathrooms). Household sizes can range from 2 to 10 people, with smaller households generally thought to work best. Two bedroom properties tend to be popular with potential sharers and work well on the whole, but they can have some disadvantages. Disputes between two people in a two bedroom flatshare can have much more impact than in a larger household. If there is a delay between one flatsharer moving out and the vacant room being relet, the remaining flatsharer can sometimes be resistant to sharing after having become used to living on their own.

Co-ops vary in the extent to which they try to be prescriptive about how households should operate. Some include standard clauses about noise, communal cleaning etc in the tenancy agreements, whereas others encourage households to work out suitable arrangements for themselves. In the example quoted below, giving maximum choice and control to sharers was felt to be important for creating ownership and commitment amongst the household.

Some co-ops accept people with support needs into shared households, and this can work successfully. However problems have arisen for some co-ops where support is not available for those people when required.

Phoenix Housing Co-op operates an open waiting list and categorises all applicants (including internal transfers) according to the urgency and severity of their housing need. Applicants must be single and earning less than £18,000 per year. When a property or room becomes vacant, those with the highest needs are considered first. But when letting a vacant room in a shared household, the compatibility of the applicant with the established household is also considered. Many of the shared households have distinctive characteristics that may suit some applicants more than others e.g. an 'alternative' lifestyle or very lively atmosphere. When an offer is made the applicant is required to meet all existing sharers so that both sides can decide whether they are likely to get on well together. Reasons for refusing have to be reasonable.

When disputes arise they are typically over cleanliness; sharing of bills; partners or visitors etc. The Co-op encourages sharers to talk about problems at an early stage and sort them out themselves. Where this doesn't work, other (trained) members of the Co-op will mediate. Where a person's behaviour is unacceptable they may be asked to leave. If the dispute is due to a mix of incompatible lifestyles, the Co-op will arrange a transfer to another more suitable household.

Phoenix regards its shared housing as a success. Factors influencing success are thought to be:

- being clear from the start about what is expected from people moving into shared households;
- allowing existing sharers to have some influence over new housemates;
- using the internal transfer system to allow people to 'trade-up' to better properties as an incentive to make shared living work;
- encouraging sharers to talk about and tackle any problems at an early stage;
- having arrangements in place to ensure that support is available to those who need it;
- using properties that give sufficient space and privacy for individual sharers.

4.3 Student and key worker accommodation

Shared housing is common amongst housing developed for students or key-workers in London. Many housing associations are now involved in providing such accommodation. Accommodation specifically developed for students or key workers is not regarded as 'social housing' by the Housing Corporation and therefore does not have regulatory standards directly applied to it. The aim of such housing is to provide accommodation at sub-market rents, for people who would otherwise struggle to afford to live in London (or other high cost areas).

It is usually developed in partnership with universities or large employers like the NHS or Metropolitan Police. Since it is normally developed without capital or revenue subsidy, costs have to be kept as low as possible so as to enable them to be covered by rents that are still affordable to those on low incomes.

Typical rents can be around £80 or £90 a week, including council tax and bills, for a single room (sometimes with ensuite facilities) in a four to six bedroom cluster which includes a shared kitchen and living area. Rents for a double room are around £120 a week. Two bedroom flats are difficult to make viable, however smaller household are seen to be easier to manage.

To keep capital costs down, developments tend to be large and use standard build types (i.e. identical layout and room sizes throughout). Developments might house 100 to 200 people. Staffing levels are also low, typically with one manager for every 400 units.

Assured shorthold tenancies are given, and the average length of stay is around one year. Nominations usually come directly from employers or universities and applications are held until a suitable vacancy arises. The housing manager makes judgements about who might be suitable for a particular vacancy, largely depending on lifestyle or age. The criteria used to make these judgements are often not written down, and are based on experience of the types of people who usually get on together. So, for instance, people of a similar background or culture might be housed together, and shift workers are unlikely to be accommodated with those working a regular 9-5.

The need to avoid the void costs associated with delays (unless the nominating source is willing to meet those costs), means that prospective sharers don't normally get a chance to meet members of an existing household. However the preferences of both sides (for instance a preference for a women only-household) will normally be taken into account.

Expectations are made very clear from the outset and there are often specific clauses in the tenancy agreement around cleanliness, noise, damage etc. Where disputes arise between sharers, they are encouraged to sort them out amongst themselves, with the housing manager only intervening when there has been a clear tenancy breach. Because of the scale of the developments it is often possible to transfer people to another household where necessary or desirable.

Property inspections can be an important feature of management. One provider carries out regular monthly inspections of occupied properties (but not bedrooms) to ensure that they are being kept clean and free of damage. Another prepares a detailed property inspection list at the beginning of each letting and requires the new tenant to sign an agreement to keep the property in the same condition.

4.4 Lodgings schemes

Lodgings schemes involve the matching of people in need of accommodation with a landlord who has a room to rent out in their own home. Where such schemes operate for homeless or vulnerable people, support is offered to both the tenant and the landlord to make the arrangement work.

Lodgings schemes can work with a variety of client groups however, and with varying levels of support provided. At their most simplistic they act as an 'introductions agency' concerned with making successful matches between landlords and prospective tenants. As such they perform a valuable service to both sides and can increase the amount of accommodation of this type available in a local area. They may offer support to both the tenant and landlord, to increase the chances of a successful arrangement, by helping to resolve disputes which arise or if an arrangement appears to be breaking down.

Successful schemes can build up a relationship of trust with potential landlords that encourages them to let a 'stranger' into their own home. Part of their success seems

to be due to their willingness to recognise and respond to the needs and wishes of both landlord and tenant in order to create a successful partnership.

The RASH lodgings scheme operated by Frays Housing Association finds lodgings for single homeless people in the boroughs of Hillingdon and Harrow. The bulk of its work is in 'matching' people in need of housing with resident landlords willing to rent a room out in their home.

With only 1½ staff it currently has 88 people in lodgings and has provided housing advice to 635 in 2002.

The scheme provides support to both the landlord and the lodger. It interviews all applicants and landlords thoroughly to assess their suitability for the scheme and to explore their needs, expectations and lifestyle. It also inspects all properties. This information is then used to match the prospective landlords and tenants together. The criteria for doing so are not written down but are more intuitive, and based on 15 years of experience. The matching process takes account of expressed preferences as well as factors such as age, gender and lifestyle. The support offered also includes help with housing benefits and in sorting out disputes.

Those using the lodgings scheme have licence agreements with their landlord and pay £50 to £90 a week for a room including bills. The average stay is around a year but it can range from a few months to a few years. People who commit a serious breach of the licence agreement they have with their landlord are unable to use the scheme again.

Frays make no charge to either landlords or lodgers for using the scheme. Instead it is largely financed by the association's own resources. Adverts are placed in local papers for landlords. There are no problems recruiting landlords or lodgers, but the lack of funding prevents the scheme from expanding.

The scheme also finds people to live in flatshares where the landlord is not resident, although those types of properties are more difficult to come by. In these cases tenants are given an assured shorthold tenancy.

The ability to assess who might be suitable to live together is seen to be crucial to success in both types of accommodation. By respecting the needs and wishes of both sides, the scheme has been able to maintain a sufficient demand for the service from both landlords and tenants.

4.5 Shared housing with 'responsible' tenants

The use of 'responsible' tenants is in some ways similar to supported lodgings, except in this case the 'responsible' tenant may have less right to remain in the accommodation than the other tenants of the landlord. Responsible tenants usually live rent free or on a subsidised rent in return for carrying out a monitoring role on behalf of, or supporting the work of, a housing management team.

The use of responsible tenants is one means by which staffing levels in unsupported shared housing can be kept relatively low, whilst also ensuring an adequate level of management supervision.

Responsible tenants have been used in a variety of settings and have a variety of titles, including 'volunteer caretaker' (see example below) and 'support tenant'. Their role can also vary, but may include:

- showing new tenants around the scheme and introducing them to other tenants

- ❑ making periodic visits to schemes to make sure that all is well, and that it remains clean and in good repair.
- ❑ checking to see whether tenants have abandoned
- ❑ inspecting voids
- ❑ reporting repairs
- ❑ mediating in disputes between tenants.

This role can be particularly useful in shared housing, which is more prone to wear and tear and neighbour disputes than general needs housing. The constant monitoring that is required to ensure that households are functioning well can be very time consuming for area managers, particularly if properties are scattered.

A 'responsible' tenant living nearby to a cluster of schemes, can ensure that area managers visit properties only when necessary, but at the same time identify and react quickly to problems. This can be beneficial for both provider and tenants. Providers are able to keep management costs to affordable levels as the use of responsible tenants should allow full-time staff to manage a larger number of properties. Tenants benefit from having someone they are familiar with and who is close-by, who is able to intervene when problems arise, and act as a channel of communication with the landlord.

Some general needs landlords use 'responsible' tenants in isolated housing schemes which are not easy for the housing management team to visit, and which are not of a sufficient size to merit the employment of a full time caretaker. One provider of shared housing for students offers a reduced rent to postgraduate students to 'keep an eye' on households made up of potentially raucous undergraduate students. The role of tenant members in helping to resolve disputes in shared housing run by co-ops (see 2.2. above), is also similar to that of a 'responsible' tenant to some extent.

The 'responsible tenant' can be an existing tenant whose capacity to fulfil that role has been recognised, or someone recruited and offered accommodation specifically for that purpose. They are not cost free as there will be lost rental income plus the need to devote resources to their recruitment, support and supervision.

The ability to employ responsible tenants will depend on the local housing market and the nature of accommodation and other benefits offered to them. In London the role is likely to be attractive to a wide variety of young professionals, including those already working in housing and who therefore have relevant experience.

Broadway is charity providing housing and support services to homeless people in London. It uses volunteer caretakers in some of its shared houses for young people with support needs. The caretaker gets a self-contained flat nearby to a number of shared houses for free in return for around 9 hours work per week. Their role is to:

- ❑ ensure that the houses are clean, safe and in good repair
- ❑ help new tenants settle in
- ❑ carry out checks on behalf of the support workers
- ❑ encourage young people to work towards a home of their own.

The caretakers work alongside and supplement support provided by full time support workers. However the organisation considers that there may be scope to extend their use to shared housing for people without support needs. In that case the caretakers may work alongside housing management rather than support staff. Under Broadway's present arrangements, one caretaker has responsibility for 3 or 4 shared houses with around 20 residents.

Volunteer caretakers are recruited in the same way as other staff, and there has been no shortage of applicants. The general lack of affordable accommodation in London has meant that Broadway has been able to recruit people who are already working in housing. People usually stay for one or two years. There are 21 caretakers in all, who are managed by a full time co-ordinator.

Broadway estimate that the costs of using each caretaker are around £200 per week, which (under their current caretaker to tenant ratio) equates to an additional £10 per week for each tenant.

The use of volunteer caretakers is seen to be very successful and is popular with tenants. However there have been occasional problems which have meant that the organisation has had to evict caretakers who are not properly fulfilling the role expected of them. Factors that are seen to be crucial to success are:

- clear roles and responsibilities for the caretakers
- clear boundaries between the caretakers and other staff
- regular support and supervision
- providing accommodation that is close to but not part of the shared housing.

4.6 General needs hostels

There are over 200 hostels in London, largely catering for single homeless people with a need for help with rehousing or some other kind of support need e.g. mental health problem, substance or alcohol abuse. Hostels for homeless people largely operate as supported housing and have the provision of housing and support in their aims. The aim of the support offered is to enable residents to acquire the life skills and independence required to find and keep more independent accommodation.

There are other hostels in London which do not operate to a supported housing model. Most of these hostels cater only for people who either work or are students, and usually exclude new residents on housing benefit. Some operate on a semi-hotel basis, and will provide accommodation to people needing accommodation for only a few days, as well as longer stays.

One large provider of accommodation of this type in London is a registered charity, whose objective is 'to provide accommodation at reasonable cost for working people and students'. Its hostels are all in central or inner London and prices for a single room range from £96 in a self-catering hostel through to £115 for a single room with breakfast and dinner in a catered hostel. The accommodation is very popular.

Rent is payable in advance. Residents are required to pay a deposit of £50 to cover breakages or any damage caused during their stay which can be retained if the resident fails to give less than one weeks notice of departure. An additional deposit of £10 is required for keys. If residents go into arrears a 5% surcharge is levied and the residency may be terminated. Residents have very little security of tenure.

Visitors must be notified to the manager and are not allowed to stay overnight. The hostels are staffed on a 24 hour basis and the staff team includes a house manager, reception staff, security staff, cleaners and catering staff. Individual rooms are cleaned by the hostel cleaners.

As well as hostels catering only for students and working people, there are other hostels in London which cater for single homeless people on relatively low levels of staffing, as the case study below illustrates.

Wesley House is a hostel for single homeless people in Newham. It was originally set up 40 years ago to cater for Christians wanting to study in London, but has gradually evolved to now cater for single homeless people generally, of mixed faiths and nationalities. The hostel has 14 rooms, each with a wash hand basin. Kitchen and bathroom facilities are shared.

There is one member of staff managing the hostel for approximately 10 hours per week. Rents are £47 a week and include heating and lighting. The hostel is self-financing without additional subsidy.

The hostel houses single people who are homeless or in urgent housing need for some other reason. The average stay is a year to 18 months, although this has increased in recent years due to the lack of affordable alternatives. People usually leave to go to self-arranged flatshares; out of London or back to their country of origin. The age of current residents ranges from 18 to 51 years. Tenants are given assured shorthold tenancies.

People who appear to have long term support needs e.g. drug misuse or mental health problems, are not accepted. Low level support is provided to some residents, although the emphasis is on referring to other local agencies rather than providing support directly. The willingness to respect the rights of other residents is seen to be an important requirement, as only one or two people behaving badly e.g. stealing food from other tenants, can upset the atmosphere of the whole hostel. Sixteen to eighteen year olds are seen to be more of a challenge in that respect, and the manager aims to have no more than one or two residents in that age range at any one time.

There are house rules, but these are not necessarily strictly enforced. For instance, tenants are allowed to have friends to stay as long as this does not disturb or cause a nuisance to other residents. The manager lives close by and visits the hostel about five times a week to make sure that everything is okay. Where neighbour disputes arise he encourages residents to talk to each other and sort matters out. He will not normally intervene unless the dispute escalates e.g. tenants refuse to respond to reasonable approaches from other tenants. The hostel promotes mutual respect amongst residents and between residents and staff.

There is no shortage of demand for the accommodation. Recent vacancies have tended to be let to friends or family of current residents, who are also homeless. In practice, their homelessness has often led to them staying at the hostel (in their friend/relative's room) for 2 or 3 weeks before being offered a place. Their ability and willingness to behave in a way acceptable to other residents is therefore often known before they are offered a tenancy. Existing tenants are firstly given an opportunity to 'trade up' to bigger or nicer rooms when vacancies arise.

The hostel has been extended from 11-14 rooms. It was easier to ensure a good mix of people with only 11 rooms. Key factors seen to influence the hostel's success are:

- continuity of staff and management approach
- careful selection of tenants
- size (i.e. no more than 14 rooms)
- part-time manager (therefore less likely to experience 'burn out' from a large caseload).

The Manager would like to develop further accommodation on another site to meet demand. He would also like to develop a befriending service for those residents that require more support than can be offered.

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