



National Development Team **for inclusion**



Essex County Council

ESSEX HOUSING BROKERAGE SERVICE EVALUATION REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Valuing People Now set out a clear commitment to offering people with learning disabilities a greater range of housing and support choices. However nationally it continues to be the case that the actual choices available can be very limited - the biggest proportion of Local Authority spending in this area of activity is on Residential Care. Nationally there is evidence showing that when offered a choice the majority of people would choose options other than Residential Care. Turning this situation around will require focussed and purposeful activity based on a commitment to make choice a reality for people with learning disabilities. The financial pressures that increasingly have an influence on decision-making highlight the need to make sure that the resources available are focussed as much as possible on cost effective services which meet the needs and preferences of the people being supported.

Delivering 'personalised' housing and support involves a complex process of merging housing needs with support needs in as seamless a way as possible. Achieving this requires focus, skill and commitment and a willingness of the key people and agencies to work together- not always an easy task!

The NDTi Housing & Inclusion project commenced in October 2009. This was a two year project run by the NDTi and supported by the Dept of Health. Essex County Council (ECC) were selected as one of seven national sites to participate in the project.

The key aims of the Housing and Inclusion project were to explore how ECC could:

- support service users to move on to more independent living and help people with a learning disability access a range of housing options from both the social and private sector
- promote equality and community inclusion

Essex County Council as a large shire authority with 12 Districts, Boroughs and City councils has a wide range of housing provision with a high proportion of owner occupation, limited social rented housing stocks and a significant supply of shared housing developed as a consequence of long stay hospital closures and campus re-provision.

Within the project, ECC identified the possibility of the development of a housing brokerage service to support people with learning disabilities to access a range of housing options and increase the numbers of people moving onto more independent living.

In 2011 Essex County Council (ECC) made the decision to put in place a demonstration project to pilot a Housing Brokerage Service which could test out one new way of

delivering this important and challenging task. The need to offer people a way of identifying what housing and support options were available for them and then crucially, to offer them continuing support to turn their preferences into reality.

ECC produced a business case setting out the resources and support required to set up the demonstration project as well as the funding needed for the dedicated Housing Broker post. The funding was agreed and the demonstration project was initially funded for a period of one year from the Learning Disability Development Fund.

ECC were clear from the outset that the demonstration project would need to be evaluated in order to inform any future housing brokerage activity, ECC then began to look at how the demonstration project could be set up. A project working group was established and discussions commenced with Dimensions UK. Dimensions UK is a national housing care and support organisation and although they did not have experience of housing brokerage implemented a personalised approach in a range of their services. Dimension UK do not hold significant amounts of housing stock in Essex and working in partnership with them would not raise any issues or cause any conflict around the letting of void properties. Dimensions UK worked in partnership with ECC to set up the demonstration project. It was agreed that Dimensions would be the managing organisation and employ the Housing Broker for the project.

ECC and Dimensions UK worked together to produce the job role and person specification for the Housing Broker's post. The post was advertised in April 2011, interviews took place in May 2011 with the Housing Broker appointed in July 2011.

A significant amount of time was invested in setting up the project both in terms of systems and processes, publicising the project, working with ECC's Operational Teams and establishing and developing relationships with local authorities, housing providers and estate agents. In setting up the demonstration project, initial consideration was given to restricting the demonstration project to the north of the county however as the project progressed it soon became apparent that due to the housing need of those referred the project would need to operate county wide. It was also clear that the demonstration project would need a gatekeeper. Case management activity is normally the role of the Operational Teams, but it was agreed that the Strategic Commissioning team would undertake this role as data regarding referral types, housing need and the issues that prevented referrals being progressed needed to be collated and understood in order to inform future housing brokerage activity.

The demonstration project was launched on the 1st July 2011. The Housing Broker embarked on a programme of visits to talk to Operational Teams, Local Authority partners, Housing Dept's, Local Action Groups, Registered Social Landlords, Private Landlords and Estate Agents to raise the profile of the project and ensure that the aims of the project were understood. The aim of Essex Housing Brokerage Service (EHBS) was:

- To pilot a Housing Brokerage demonstration project for people with learning disabilities.

- Provide a person-centred approach and an outcome focused service to individuals, supporting them and their families to access housing options and help them move onto more independent living.
- Provide the necessary support and advice to enable people to make an informed choice about their living arrangements and give them the same rights and responsibilities as other citizens.

It was expected that the Housing Broker would carry a 'caseload' of between 10-13 people and that between 20-24 cases would be completed annually.

A Project Management Group was established which involved senior staff from ECC, the Dimensions Regional Manager and NDTi. Activity monitoring forms were developed and regularly reviewed by the Project Management Group. It was seen as fundamentally important, as a demonstration project, to gather data on the process and its outcomes in order to provide evidence about the projects work.



THE EVALUATION PROCESS

This approach is innovative and has potential national as well as local relevance. ECC have been working with NDTi on housing and support issues for people with learning disabilities in recent years. NDTi were asked to evaluate the work of the first year of the EHBS as part of a general programme of work in Essex.

This report is based on an evaluation of the first year of the EHBS between July 2011 - July 2012, although the report refers to learning from delivering the project up until October 2012.

It was decided to combine 3 areas of activity to carry out the evaluation process. Following receipt of research governance approval:

- Questionnaires were sent to everyone who had been supported by EBHS between July 2011 and July 2012 – a total of 27 questionnaires were sent out.
- Interviews were conducted with 6 people who had used the service
- Phone interviews were carried out with 3 key professionals who have been connected with the work of the project

8 questionnaires were returned and so in total 14 people of the 27 who used the service during the evaluation period have been involved - approximately 50% of the total. This represents a good proportion of those involved and the following section provides a summary account of the people involved in the evaluation and their views on the services they receive.



HOW THE BROKERAGE SERVICE WAS DELIVERED

The housing broker appointed in 2011 came to the post having gained considerable experience in supported and specialist housing having worked for a local registered social landlord across a large geographical area within Essex providing intensive housing management

Before taking referrals it was important that the broker understood the supply of specialist housing available already, the housing responsibilities within the county as each LA has a different approach to Choice Based lettings. Relationships needed to be developed with estate agents and private landlords as well as Essex County Council operational staff working in social care. Given the wide variety of people and organisations who would need to know about the housing brokerage service a range of literature was produced for

- Estate Agents
- Social Work Staff
- Families
- Advocates
- Social Work Teams
- Registered Housing Providers
- Private Landlords

At an early stage of the work of the project, information for the people who might use the EHBS was produced in accessible and other formats which were widely distributed. Examples of the information produced are available on the NDTi website at www.ndti.org.uk/major-projects/housing-and-social-inclusion-project/ It had been decided that self-referrals would be welcomed in addition to referrals from professionals.

Although there were wide variations in the way in which individuals were referred to through this process, an 'average' process could be described as

Step 1	Housing need identified through review or assessment by Social Worker.
Step 2	Accommodation needs assessment completed by Social Worker and agreed for presentation and discussion at ECC internal board meeting
Step3	Referral information quality checked to ensure that all criteria met for referral

	to Joint Referral Meeting i.e referral has been registered on housing register and either has capacity to understand and sign a tenancy or has a Court of Protection deputy appointed
Step 4	Vacancies within shared supported living properties considered for suitability
Step 5	If no suitable vacancies, referral would then be made to the Housing Broker
Step 6	Housing Broker would then liaise with the person referred, their family, Social Worker and other professionals as appropriate to understand housing need and explore the range of housing options available.
Step 7	With the information available about the person, a knowledge of the vacancies available and new developments, there is then a person-centred process of exploring the most suitable housing and support option.

This activity always involved working with a range of other agencies including:

- The Social Work Team
- A range of possible advocacy support
- District, Boroughs, City Councils
- Registered Providers
- Estate Agents
- Local private landlords
- Care providers

Families were often closely involved in discussions and the planning process. Not all of the people who were in contact with the EHBS moved into new housing and support arrangements. This was for a wide range of reasons including, for example:

- The person referred no longer wanted to move
- Alternative housing had been sourced prior to referral to EHBS
- The person referred did not have capacity to understand and sign a tenancy and did not have a Court of Protection deputy appointed therefore referral could not be progressed
- No social worker available to support process due to long term sickness
- The person being able to remain in current property as issues that had prompted the need to move had been better identified and understood by the Housing Broker. Issues were then resolved with the input of the Housing Broker enabling people to maintain their current tenancies. In some instance the Housing Broker was able to

negotiate with the Housing Provider for service users to remain in move on schemes as their housing need could continue to be met

- Families did not support the move and did not consider the accommodation identified as a suitable housing option



KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED for Essex County Council and the Housing Broker

During the course of planning and delivering the EHBS a range of key issues were identified for both Essex County Council and the Housing Broker. The evaluation did not seek feedback from other stakeholders e.g. employing organisation, families, social workers.

Essex County Council

- how to identify the funding for this project
- how the post should be managed so that the learning from the project was optimised but that the interface with operational activity was appropriate
- how to maintain a high quality referral process with supporting information
- how to ensure that mental capacity /Court of Protection issues were fully understood and correct procedures in place
- how to ensure that all aspects of the process (notably the validation of care packages and final agreement on the level of support funding) were fully in place
- how to ensure that operational staff understood the importance of people being on the Housing Register
- operational teams were not always in a position to prioritise reviews where people wished to move
- the size of Essex (with 12 districts/boroughs/city authorities and a significant number of housing providers) could be an issue especially when the aspiration of people was to move across boundaries that they did not necessarily recognise
- many people wanted types and locations that were not available within the current housing supply and the need to acknowledge that some of the practical aspects of delivering this work were complex e.g. making arrangements for visits and how social workers could prioritise this activity within their current work loads
- the need for Social Workers to allow sufficient time for housing options to be developed in circumstances where quick action was desirable
- the need to clarify the role of Social Workers in the process

- the need to manage expectations when more specialised housing and support was needed
- the need to manage the expectations of the people being referred and their families

The Housing Broker

- the need for clarity about different roles and responsibilities and the need for excellent information and communication at all stages
- the need to make sure that the information used for the Housing Needs Assessment was high quality
- the need to ensure that people being referred, their families and professionals involved were aware of the support available from the Housing Department (including help to complete forms, join the Housing Register and bid for properties)
- the importance of working with Estate Agents and private landlords to address their cautious approach to accepting people with learning disabilities as tenants
- the importance of raising the awareness of families and professionals about mental capacity/Court of Protection issues and processes
- the need to work to avoid delays in validating care packages - potentially a major concern (especially where delays will affect following through quickly with available housing options that require speedy decisions e.g. on rent guarantee arrangements)
- the need to ensure that the role boundaries of the Housing Broker are kept to

The Housing Brokerage experience for the individual with learning disabilities

Offering people a person-centred problem solver has been invaluable for those involved with this project. Time after time people commented on the Housing Brokers ability to respond quickly and to negotiate with different agencies to resolve any difficulties that occurred.

A number of people contrasted this with the difficulties they experienced before the start of this project.

Every respondee highlighted the value of having dedicated support to help with finding accommodation and supporting people through the complex processes involved.

One of the remarkable features of the way the Housing Broker has worked has been the speed with which she has been able to negotiate her way through different stages of the process. This is particularly important both because moving quickly is often a strong advantage for the

Catherine – living with family but family relationship was at risk of breaking down as her father was terminally ill and being nursed by her mother. The broker supported Catherine with an application to a registered housing provider. Catherine was assessed but initially refused as the assessing officer stated that Catherine did not meet the criteria for housing. The broker was able to challenge this decision as she felt the assessing officer lacked experience. A further assessment was carried out; Catherine was accepted and has now been rehoused in a one bedroom property with support attached.

people involved but also delays often result in lost opportunities, increased costs or both.

During the evaluation process a number of comments were made by the people using this service, their families and professionals involved. There are attached as Appendix 1.

Who Accessed the Service

A review of the full group of people supported by the project between July 2011-July 2012 shows that a wide variety of people have been involved including people with high support needs. 8 people lacking mental capacity have been included and 1 person from black and minority ethnic communities.

A significant majority of people involved have been under 30 years old. This is highly significant because housing and support for people with learning disabilities can be needed for many years - cost effective and person-centred housing and support solutions are often far preferable to traditional services which can have built in upward cost pressures for Social Care budgets.

There should be potential to apply this approach for older people with learning disabilities, not least those living at home with older family carers

Between July 2011 and October 2012 42 people were involved with the EHBS although the evaluation initially focussed on the period July 2011 to July 2012 it is useful to use information collated since in this report.

Key Features of this group include:

- 20 were men 22 were women

The age ranges are shown below Age Ranges	No.
<25	17
26-30	10
31-40	4
41-50	5
51-60	3
61-65	2
>65	
No date of birth supplied	1
Total	42

- The majority were living with their families at initial referral

- Of the total involved, to date 45 % have moved into different housing and support, more suited to their needs
- Of the 42 people involved during this period
 - 19 have been housed
 - 7 have not been housed (for reasons set out on page 8 above)
 - 14 are ongoing
 - 2 have withdrawn

The process would on average take 2-3 months. Occasionally, where specialist service design was needed, this might take longer.

The Range of Housing Options

One of the successes of this project has been that it has delivered on one of the key criteria i.e. to develop a wider range of housing and support choices in an affordable way.

The range of options used is impressive and includes;

- Shared supported living
- Private rented
- Local Authority
- Shared Ownership
- Choice based lettings
- Management transfers
- Extra care schemes
- Shared Lives

It has been possible to work within the financial parameters set by Local Housing Allowance.

No requests were made by individuals seeking to share housing with friends.

David – living at home with family, but relationship at serious risk of breaking down. The broker was able to find accommodation with a college programme attached to the tenancy. David now attends college 2 days per week, engages fully with his college and has expanded his social circle. The accommodation was also close to his existing circle of support which has enabled him to repair family relationships and avoid a crisis situation.

The Involvement of Families

It was notable in many of the situations looked at in more detail as part of this evaluation that assertive families often played a key role at least in getting their family members to the 'starting gate' with this process. Again feedback on the role of the Housing Broker was uniformly very positive - the Housing Broker was seen as a strong ally in helping family members to stay positively involved in the process- it was important to them that they were



able to stay involved to the degree that was suitable. The Housing Broker's way of working and her understanding of this perspective was a key element in making this aspect of the work successful.

BARRIERS EXPERIENCED

During the course of the work of the project a number of barriers were experienced, many of these are entirely predictable and progress was made in overcoming these barriers in most cases during this project. However it is useful to set these out to offer an account of the sorts of challenges that will be faced when setting up schemes of this sort.

● Practitioner understanding

There are varying levels of knowledge about housing and support choices and the key role that different practitioners play in helping the process go as smoothly and as quickly as possible. A good proportion of the time available was spent carrying out 'educational work'. Planning awareness raising measures would be valuable for the future.

● Unrealistic expectations

Although there is evidence of a high level of satisfaction from those people who have been supported by the EHBS, a number of people came into the project with unrealistically high expectations of the range of housing and support options that would be available within the resources available. The Housing Broker's role included setting out realistic expectations for the people involved, both the parents and the people directly using the service.

● Connections with other important processes

The Housing Broker's role did not directly include involvement in decisions on funding for individuals care/support needs, although there were inevitable issues which emerged. It is very important to clarify the boundaries of the Broker role in this key area.

● Personal finances

Anyone looking at private rental arrangements will need £1,200-£1,500 (depending on rental charge) to set up a private rent option unless they have this or can apply for a grant to support the deposit which has to be completed immediately. Applications for Discretionary Housing

Peter – lived in a shared local authority property. His co-tenants support needs changed resulting in the co-tenant being transferred to a property where his needs could be met leaving Peter under occupying the property. Peter was also about to be served with a notice due to problems with his rent. The broker was able to establish that the rent arrears were due to a lack of communication between the circle of support and Housing Benefits and the issue was resolved. Peter was also supported by the broker to transfer to a smaller property which met his needs.



Payment can only be made once individuals are in receipt of Housing Benefit. Recent welfare reform changes has removed rent in advance/deposit from the new Essential Living Fund which replaces the crisis loan/Community Care Grant. Most private rent options will not wait for a deposit unless this has been agreed direct with the landlord, and from the moment a property is identified access to the deposit and rent in advance needs to be in place. If the individual is already in receipt of Housing Benefit they can apply for a discretionary payment but this can be time consuming and will involve a wait for the landlord. One suggestion is that a fund is available for loans to cover this stage which can be repaid over time.

- Mental capacity

Some people wanting to access housing and support options will have been determined as not having the mental capacity to decide on various aspects of this process. It is fundamentally important to resolve how to work within these constraints to ensure that this group of people are realistically included, in particular resolving how best to go through Court of Protection, best interests decision making, decisions, etc. There is no reason in principle why this group of people cannot be included – but managing this can be more time consuming and complex and it is important for careful process management to be in place.

- Reluctance from some private landlords and estate agents to accept people with Learning Disabilities as tenants
- If someone is in receipt of benefits they will need a guarantor. If this person is not working or in receipt of £15-18k income they cannot be a guarantor. So older family members who are retired cannot act as guarantor if their income is lower than this.
- The role of practitioners in negotiating with providers

Many people interviewed contrasted the benefits of having the EHBS available to help with detailed negotiations with providers, often contrasting this with their experience of when care managers performed this role.

- Care packages

Delays in agreeing the funding for individuals support/care package available can jeopardise the availability of suitable properties as landlords are often not willing to incur rental loss during this time.

It was essential for the work of this project that it was overseen by a senior member of staff at least initially – it is likely that this level of support will be needed as new schemes are introduced.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

Scoping and setting up the housing brokerage service involved considerable officer time from ECC, and a business case was needed to inform decisions on funding. A best estimate was made on the housing broker caseload alongside the not insignificant activity required to set the service up with no previous experience.

We have tried to capture the financial implications of offering the EHBS to people.

Whilst we have relied on a degree of

judgement on what the service costs are likely

to have been if the EHBS had not existed- and clearly this is not an exact science - it does make clear that investing in the EHBS delivers on a key objective i.e. to ensure that greater choices in this area of services are delivered in an affordable way. In fact, the information we have seems to indicate quite clearly that investing in the EHBS approach has contributed to significantly reduced spending for some people, while at the same time delivering a high level of satisfaction to people with learning disabilities and their families.

These savings in one year have more than covered the cost of the Housing Broker and the set up costs of the project and as a consequence the post is self-sustaining. On average the costs of the support that people received in the accommodation sourced through the housing broker was less than half that of a typical placement in a registered care home.

Testing out this approach has provided valuable evidence of what has worked well and what might have been done differently if the EHBS was being set up afresh.

Clearly there have been many positives from the work to date. Some key lessons stand out if this approach is going to be replicated.

- The need to agree what data should be routinely gathered in order to provide evidence of outcomes (and time set aside to carry out these functions)
- Establishing clear lines of communication with key operational staff (and other stake holders) so that decision making pathways are agreed.
- The setting of boundaries of this role so that it retains a clear focus on the brokerage function. (There have been occasional pressures to move into an advocacy role – while potentially very important this can detract from the key brokerage functions if not managed carefully and it may be that housing choices need to be delayed until other issues are resolved).

Martin – was living in a registered care placement. He had previously applied to the local housing register but incorrect information had been given affecting his banding level, reducing his chances of rehousing. The broker was able to correct this by submitting the correct information, raising his banding level to enable him to bid for suitable properties. Martin was rehoused in a one bedroom flat with floating support.



- Awareness raising for the people involved, families and professionals so that realistic expectations for the process and its outcomes are clearly set out.

The broad aims for the EHBS are set out on page 5 above – essentially the intention was to introduce a focussed, specialised resource which would offer more person-centred outcome focussed housing and support options for people but in a way which challenges the resources available in a cost-effective way. The other broad intention was to demonstrate how housing brokerage could contribute to the development of an effective enablement and progression model.

While these objectives were substantially achieved, there is still further work to be done to deliver the hoped for outcomes which will require more agencies and departments to collaborate in taking some complex and challenging issues forward. These potential future areas of activity include:

- Offering people currently living in residential care the opportunity to move into more independent living settings
- An increase in home ownership
- An increase in the use of assistive technology

Referral processes are in place but can seem complicated to those not working within the authority, and response times to housing partners can always be improved.

The EHBS can be seen as a success in that up to October 2012 it has supported 19 people to move into a range of independent living settings via the service, which although at times was labour intensive has provided a quality service with an increasingly high profile. By supporting individuals and social workers in the identification of housing options, it has also supported housing providers in letting their void stock in a more timely way. By having an in depth understanding of the housing provision available across the county and developing relationships with both social and private landlords choices have been made.

CONCLUSIONS

It has been a pleasure to evaluate this project and it seems clear that this way of working has real potential for more groups of people in Essex and offers a model for other parts of the country. The early aims for the EHBS were met and exceeded in an impressive way. It highlights the fact it is of great importance to have someone at the centre of a complex and shifting process particularly if you want to ensure that it remains person-centred.

If it works as intended, this role is likely to challenge existing ways of doing things.

A number of the conclusions can be drawn:

- This approach has gone more smoothly when there is a real commitment to working together and when staff from different agencies are supported.
- It has been a strong advantage to the work of EHBS that it was led by someone with such passion and commitment.
- Critically, there is some evidence that this is a very cost-effective way of working especially when it is focused on people who were likely to go into more expensive services because of a lack of choices.
- The project has stimulated an increasing range of housing and support choices and growing confidence that people with learning disabilities can live in a wide range of housing and support settings.

This way of working has great potential for the future – it offers a practical way of delivering personalised solutions in a cost effective way.

It has been useful that the housing broker delivering this approach has a good understanding of the family perspective. The role of families in making the process work well has been highly significant for most of the people involved in EHBS to date – it can be a stressful and anxious time for people and their families and having a ‘safe pair of hands’ available to guide, especially when things aren’t going smoothly has been invaluable.

Diana – lived in a registered care placement for approx 8 years. She seemed to be a very able and confident individual, but would often create situations to attract attention to herself. She had been placed into care by her family at a very early age and did not enjoy a good relationship with her family, feeling rejected as her siblings remained in the family home. She would often give false information to staff and did not understand the level of disruption and additional work caused by her behaviours and this detracted from her being able to work with staff to develop her independence. Tammy worked with her to identify more independent living options. She moved to a shared supported flat, but after a short period of time she developed a knee problem and finding stairs a problem and was supported to transfer to a ground floor property which fully met her needs.



The role of the Housing Broker has naturally included elements of advocacy – this is entirely reasonable, but the implications of performing this function will need to be thought through as this way of working develops in the future.

The Housing Broker's work has involved all of the twelve District Councils in Essex and has started to identify a wide range of agencies and networks that should be of use in the future.

This project has also highlighted the need for planned 'progression' or 'move-on' options from existing services including registered care.

Based on the positive outcomes of the first year of Learning Disability Housing Brokerage demonstration project, ECC has agreed to continue fund this service and has secured further funding up until March 2014. Using the learning from this project, ECC successfully launched a second project on the 1st Oct 2012 in partnership with Dimensions UK, supporting people with Physical and Sensory impairment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information gathered, I propose the following recommendations:

- The scheme should be continued
- Housing Brokerage activity can be used to support progression activity
- This approach could be extended to a wider range of people including other vulnerable groups
- This service could be offered on an individual basis to self-funders
- This service could be offered to providers hoping to remodel their services or to develop their skills and knowledge in offering people move on options.
- There should be a continued focus on improving the 'customer journey' by looking at improvements to the process where possible.
- More attention could be paid to increasing home ownership options in the future
- This approach could place greater emphasis on assistive technology



APPENDIX 1

Quotes from people who have used the service and their families

There was a very high level of satisfaction with the service provided

"I wouldn't have known about my choices. I feel very confident in Tammy – it was a big weight off my shoulders"

"I could always phone her – I didn't have to wait for an appointment, she would phone you back if you left a message"

"If it was just me trying to fight, we wouldn't have it"

"It was very useful to have Tammy to ask questions no-one else knew the answers to"

"Nothing was too much trouble for Tammy – we trusted her completely. We would recommend her to anyone"

"Tammy was my personal guardian angel"

"We watched a programme on TV and my daughter said, 'Promise me you will never put me in residential care'"

"Tammy joins up the dots"

"Because Tammy know the system she knows how to make things happen"

Quotes from professionals

"Tammy kept in touch. She fully understood what was needed. She was very proactive"

"Tammy acted as a coordinator – she pushed things through. She told me – 'I will liaise and sort things out – this is someone's life!'"

"We will certainly let Tammy know if we have any further vacancies"