

Safe As Houses:  
An inclusive approach for housing drug users

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Background

Perceptions:

- Drug use and housing need linked
- Many problematic drug users excluded from housing provision
- It is illegal to house continuing users
- Many are 'too difficult to assist'

## Shelter

Problematic drug use and housing need –  
Is there a link?

Hard to assess the exact correlation

- Lack of consistency across disciplines in the capture and recording
- 'Hidden' populations – not in contact with services
- Definitions – homeless, NFA, rough sleeper, drug user

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Research does indicate strong link

- Audit Commission 2004: 1 in 3 drug users presenting for treatment in housing need
- Rough sleepers research 2002: reports of drug use by 50-80% in some areas
- Crisis report 2002:
  - 83% of sample had used a drug other than alcohol in the last month
  - nearly half injectedDrug use a trigger for homelessness  
Homelessness a stronger trigger for drug use

## Shelter

### Survey

- 13 street outreach teams
- 9 North West day centres
- average report of 61-70% of service users use drugs
- Problems accessing accommodation
- Very problematic for drug users
- Also very problematic: the range of accommodation for drug users and maintaining accommodation for drug users

## Shelter

### Implications

- Housing and homelessness strategy
- Drug treatment and health
- Supporting People
- Criminal Justice

Joint planning and integration across all

# Shelter

## Provision of housing and support for drug users

### Support

- Peripatetic substance misuse services
- In-house specialist workers
- In-house generic staff with training
- Floating support
- Links to external agencies

### Housing Provision

- Direct access hostels
- Night shelters
- Specialist supported housing
- Generic supported housing
- Shared housing
- Foyers
- Social housing tenancy

# Shelter

Good practice handbook (ODPM 2002) – need for a range of accommodation that provides for continuing drug users as well as those who wish to live in a drug-free environment

### Exclusions

- No drug users
- Must be on treatment programme
- Must be motivated to change
- No drugs/drug use on premises

May displace drug use into less safe, public places and discourages engagement

Drug use not acknowledged by housing provider

## Shelter

Should drug users remain homeless until they are motivated to address their drug use?

Harm reduction

- Safer for the drug user
- Safer for staff
- Safer for other residents
- Safer for the community

Acknowledge and proactively manage the risks – not *laissez faire*

## Shelter

Legal implications:

- Section 8 Misuse of Drugs Act 1971
- Section 1 Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003

Neither precludes accommodating drug users and managing use on site

## Innovative Projects

- Sinclair Project – Leeds
- Wallich Clifford Community – Cardiff
- New Steine Mews – Brighton
- Single Homeless Project – London
- In Partnership Project – Blackburn
- St Mungo's – London
- Julian Housing – Norfolk

Varied provision including direct access hostels, first and second stage hostels, shared housing and floating support in independent tenancies

## Good Practice

- Beyond legal requirements
- Clear aims and objectives for projects  
Comprehensive, balanced drugs policy
- Informed by local need and integrated with other provision
- Physical environment managed
- Holistic approach to housing & support
- Staff, training, support & supervision
- Multi-agency working
- Links to move-on accommodation

## Shelter

### Benefits

- Access to housing for an excluded group
- Increased openness in managing risks
- Safer practice
- Improvements in health  
wound care, overdose prevention
- Positive treatment outcomes
- Reduction in offending

## Shelter

### Conclusions

- Problematic drug users experience acute housing need
- Need for a range of housing and support
- Integrated - harm reduction to drug free
- Harm reduction – legal, safe & effective