

[The following paper was produced by the Recovery Partnership for the Inter-Ministerial Group on Drugs (IMG), and was discussed at the IMG meeting in July. The Recovery Partnership (DrugScope, Recovery Group UK and the Substance Misuse Skills Consortium) would like to thank everyone who commented on the draft paper and who completed the online survey.]

HOUSING AND RECOVERY: MEETING THE CHALLENGE

Recovery Partnership briefing for the Inter-Ministerial Group on Drug Policy

The Recovery Partnership welcomes the clear recognition from Government in the 2010 Drug Strategy of the importance of housing. We look forward to continuing to work with Ministers and officials to improve access to housing for users of drug and alcohol services. Housing is not only central to our shared vision for recovery-orientated services, but for other key policy initiatives, including the DWP's 'work programme' and the Ministry of Justice's plans to cut re-offending. We are aware that Government wants to see housing issues addressed locally and has given Local Authorities more flexibility to allocate their housing budgets to reflect local priorities. We also recognise the real potential of the local structures being created by Government to support partnership work to deliver on recovery (for example, through Health and Wellbeing Boards).

There is, however, a concern amongst our memberships that housing could become a 'weak link' in emerging recovery frameworks. The National Treatment Agency's 'Action Plan for 2011-12' explains that 'housing is a local matter which will be addressed with varying degrees of priority across the country', and that the challenge is therefore 'to mitigate the potential for inadequate housing provision to undermine recovery'. This is not an encouraging situation for those drug and alcohol (and other) services working to deliver on the Government's vision for recovery-orientated systems in localities where housing support for their clients is not a priority. We would therefore welcome a discussion at IMG of the potential to balance localism with sufficient national leverage to ensure that our members have the tools to deliver on the 2010 Drug Strategy in all localities.

An online survey of our memberships (to inform this paper) highlights the difficulties of accessing housing in many local areas. It was completed by 89 respondents, representing statutory, independent and voluntary sector organisations. Key findings included:

- 32% said that housing services were 'difficult to access' in their local area and a further 39% said they were 'very difficult to access';
- 64% expected housing services to become 'less accessible' in the next 12 months;
- 47% said 'safe, secure and appropriate accommodation' was 'difficult to access' in their local area and 42% said it was 'very difficult to access';
- 62% expected it to become 'less accessible' in the next 12 months;
- 34% of respondents said that local housing stakeholders had 'some engagement' in the recovery agenda, while 43% reported 'an insufficient level of engagement';
- 15% reported 'good progress' on 'effective joint working' across the two sectors, 49% said there had been 'some progress' and 30% 'little progress'; and

- 53% said that removal of the Supporting People (SP) ring-fence had resulted in a 'decrease in SP funding for projects supporting our clients', with 17 out of 32 respondents who felt able to express a view estimating cuts of between 25% and 50% in SP funding, and 4 respondents reporting cuts of over 50%.

Key issues for the Recovery Partnership

1. Supporting People. We would welcome consideration of mechanisms for transparency and accountability in allocation of SP funding to balance local flexibility with the housing provision required to deliver the 2010 Drug Strategy.
2. Welfare reform. There are concerns about the impact of housing benefit changes on recovery. A particular concern is the proposal to extend to all claimants under 35 rules preventing them receiving housing benefit for self-contained accommodation that currently apply to under 25 year olds only. More service users in recovery could be placed in inappropriate multiple occupancy and hostel style accommodation with people who are still misusing drugs or alcohol. Another issue, highlighted for those moving out of residential rehabilitation, is difficulties accessing, and the time it takes to get a decision on, community care grants
3. Payment by Results (PbR). We urge the Government to ensure that housing outcomes are included in PbR schemes, including the Drug Recovery PbR pilots. (It is not appropriate, however, to expect drug and alcohol services to deliver housing outcomes where there is a lack of appropriate housing in their locality.)
4. Engaging social and private-rented sector landlords. We would welcome further consideration of how national policy could support social and private sector landlords to work with marginalised and stigmatised groups, including building on innovative voluntary-sector schemes working with the private rented sector.
5. Workforce development. 16% of respondents to our survey said people working in drug and alcohol treatment had 'high training needs' on housing, and a further 79% that there was 'some training need'. 42% said people in housing services had 'high training needs' on drug/alcohol issues, and a further 54% identified some training need.
6. Specific groups. Our members are concerned about housing for people with 'dual diagnosis', single women (particularly women escaping domestic and sexual violence), children (there are an estimated 250,000 to 350,000 children of problem drug users) and resettlement for ex-prisoners in recovery.

The role of the Recovery Partnership

1. We will continue to work with our memberships to monitor the impact of housing policy on the development of recovery and feed back to IMG.
2. We would welcome opportunities to work with IMG to identify and highlight 'best practice', particularly involving the voluntary and community sector.
3. We will work with our memberships to ensure that our ambitions for recovery-orientated treatment are shared by the new public health service, local Directors of Public Health and Health and Wellbeing Boards, including a recognition of the importance of housing.

4. We would welcome future opportunities to work with IMG to facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue with leading charities in the housing sector to provide national leadership for the development of innovative partnership projects in the voluntary and community sector.

We look forward to working with the IMG to take forward the recovery agenda.

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