



LDAN Briefing on the Draft London Housing Strategy

Background

The London Housing Strategy sets out the Mayor's vision for housing in London. The consultation period for the draft strategy ends on 31st August 2009. LDAN will be responding to the consultation to highlight the particular housing needs of people with drug and alcohol problems in London.

Stable housing is essential to enable those with substance misuse issues to engage with treatment and work towards recovery. Yet individuals with substance misuse problems can face many barriers when attempting to obtain settled accommodation including a lack of coordination between relevant housing providers and support agencies.

Key Facts

Lack of stable housing can prevent substance misuse treatment from being successful

40% of drug users state that a lack of stable housing is the main barrier to them achieving their treatment goals¹

Many homeless people have substance misuse issues

42% of clients in an average homelessness project have drug problems, and 39% have alcohol support needs.²

Substance misuse can lead to homelessness

Three quarters of single homeless people have a history of problematic substance misuse³ (rising to more than 4/5 of rough sleepers)⁴

Homelessness can lead to increased substance misuse

Two thirds of individuals report increasing problem substance misuse after becoming homeless⁵

¹ Stephenson M (2005) National Aftercare Survey - Year 3, Addaction, London

² Homeless Link (2009) 'Survey of Needs and Provision', Homeless Link, London
<http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/research/mapping/SNAP2>

³ Homelessness Directorate (2002) Drug Services for Homeless People Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

⁴ Fountain J and Howes S (2001) 'Rough Sleeping, substance misuse and service provision in London' National Addiction Centre, London

⁵ Fountain J et al (2002) 'Who uses services for homeless people? An investigation amongst people sleeping rough in London'. Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 12:71-75.

Overview of the Strategy

There are three priority areas identified in the strategy. Relevant action points are included in brackets:

Priority Area 1 - Raising aspirations, promoting opportunity

Part 1.1 - Providing more homes (50,000 affordable homes by 2011. New developments to be a range of tenures and to promote mixed communities)

Part 1.2 - Helping homeowners and first time buyers (Including schemes for families at risk of homelessness)

Part 1.3 - Improving the social rented sector (30,000 new social rented houses by 2011, ending overcrowding in social housing by 2012 and schemes to reduce worklessness and increase opportunities)

Part 1.4 Improving the private rented sector (Including more use of the PRS for homeless and vulnerable households)

Priority Area 2 - Improving homes, transforming neighbourhoods

Part 2.1 - Designing better homes (including ways to avoid the creation of areas with high levels of anti-social behaviour and crime)

Part 2.2 - Producing Greener Homes (Includes a commitment to support vulnerable households in the private sector to improve their homes to the Decent Homes standard and beyond and to tackle fuel poverty)

Part 2.3 Regenerating Areas & Estates (Physical improvements in neighbourhoods to be used to deter crime and increase accessibility/inclusion and to compliment other social and economic initiatives)

Part 2.4 - Bringing Empty Homes Back Into Use

Priority Area 3 - Maximising Delivery, Optimising Value For Money

Part 3.1 - Delivering across London (driven by the HCA with responsibility devolved to the boroughs for housing delivery)

Part 3.2 - Delivering locally (Rough sleeping should be ended by 2012, the number of households in temporary accommodation should be halved by 2010, improved access to education, health and social services for those in temporary accommodation. Housing options services to be improved. Pan-London supported housing, offender and domestic violence schemes supported)

London Rough Sleeping Delivery Board

The strategy commits the Mayor to the development, implementation and monitoring of a strategic action plan to end rough sleeping by 2012, under the auspices of the new London Delivery Board. The board is comprised of the government, the boroughs and the voluntary sector, and is led by the Mayor. It has a specific commitment to support the development of a 'specialist project for rough sleepers with multiple needs especially targeting those who have behavioural and health-related problems linked with alcohol abuse.'

The full strategy is available here: <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/housing/strategy/>

Key Issues

LDAN have identified 6 policy areas to focus their response:

1. Housing, social re-integration and recovery

The 2008 ten-year drug strategy, *Drugs: protecting families and communities*⁶, has a new focus on social re-integration, including housing and employment. Stable housing is essential for those accessing or completing drug or alcohol treatment to enable them to engage with treatment services and to re-establish their lives. In one study, 40% of drug users stated that a lack of stable housing was the main barrier to them achieving their treatment goals⁷.

The Draft London Housing Strategy commits to building 30,000 new social rented houses and increasing access routes to the private rented sector for vulnerable households. It is essential that new housing providers and drug or alcohol treatment services establish clear links and referral routes to ensure that housing becomes less of a barrier to successful drug or alcohol treatment in London.

2. Access to housing

Individuals with substance misuse problems can face many barriers when attempting to obtain settled accommodation, such as negative attitudes from landlords and a lack of coordination between relevant housing providers and support agencies.

A recent survey suggests that 42% of clients in an average homelessness project have drug problems, and 39% have alcohol support needs.⁸

We welcome the London Delivery Boards' specialist project that will look at housing for those with multiple needs, especially those with behavioural and health-related problems linked with alcohol abuse.

Local connection criteria can present a real barrier to accessing supported housing and substance misuse treatment for rough sleepers with multiple needs. The suggested pan-London accommodation services could help to create more coherent pathways of support for this group.

The strategy suggests that local authority housing options services will be improved. This includes advice and support to all residents who have a housing need or concern. The improvements should include training for staff on providing holistic advice to cover issues including both substance misuse treatment and appropriate housing in the area.

3. Support in housing

The draft strategy has a focus on promoting opportunities through holistic support services for those in private rented or social housing.

⁶ <http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/publication-search/drug-strategy/drug-strategy-2008>

⁷ Stephenson M (2005) National Aftercare Survey - Year 3, Addaction, London

⁸ Homeless Link (2009) 'Survey of Needs and Provision', Homeless Link, London
<http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/research/mapping/SNAP2>

Floating support services can be very important for those with substance misuse problems, enabling them to sustain their tenancies, and should be incorporated and acknowledged in the London Housing Strategy.

4. Quality of housing

Unstable or unsuitable housing can have an extremely negative impact on drug or alcohol treatment outcomes.

Although the increased access routes into private rented sector housing is welcome, it is vital that this housing is secure and of a good standard. The stress of living in accommodation that is in a poor state of disrepair can precipitate relapse for those in treatment and push people towards drug or alcohol misuse. It can have a negative impact on everything from mental health to the ability to seek and sustain employment.

The strategy commits to “support vulnerable households in the private sector to improve their homes to the Decent Homes standard and beyond”. Local authorities should ensure that all landlords working with vulnerable households are accredited and committed to providing a high standard of housing.

5. Substance misuse, housing and welfare to work

The strategy has a clear focus on ‘areas of worklessness’ within social and private rented housing. It suggests that landlords should work with welfare to work providers to help tenants access training and employment. Landlords should also have an awareness of the additional support needs for people with substance misuse problems to move into employment and links to appropriate services.

Although many people who are stable and undertaking treatment are able to work, there is still stigma in terms of employers taking them on.

6. Impact of drug-related crime and anti-social behaviour

The draft strategy has a focus on regenerating and re-designing neighbourhoods as a means to tackle crime and anti social behaviour. Secure and well designed housing can improve the quality of life in an area and help to prevent individuals turning to drug and alcohol misuse and crime. It can also help to tackle some of the problems for communities that are associated with drug use and drug markets. However, it is important that the broader root causes of drug-related crime and anti-social behaviour are addressed and communities have adequate access to appropriate support services. The strategy includes a suggestion of ‘cross-borough pilot projects that combine accommodation and support to reduce re-offending’.

Key Questions

What are the particular issues in London that affect those with substance misuse issues who are attempting to access housing?

What can drug partnerships do to improve referral routes and pathways between housing and drug services?

Do you have any examples of the housing and drugs/alcohol sector working well together in London?

Contact

The consultation period ends on 31 August 2009. If you would like to contribute to the development of LDAN's response, or have comments on any of the above issues, then please contact Esther Sample, LDAN Policy Officer, e-mail: esthers.ldan@drugscope.org.uk