



Sharing in social housing

Crisis Help to Rent funding 2016-2018

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Together
we will end
homelessness



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Funding background

Crisis funding programmes: Sharing in social housing

In 2016 Crisis committed funding for two years to projects which focused on supporting social landlords to set up shared tenancies in social housing.

The funding commenced when the Government was still pushing ahead with its plans to apply the local housing allowance (LHA) caps to the social sector, which would have meant any social housing tenants under 35 (not eligible for any exemptions) would have only been eligible for the shared accommodation rate, and would have been likely to face a considerable shortfall if they were to stay in their existing self-contained accommodation.

For this reason, many Housing Associations (and some local authorities) have been trialling or setting up shared tenancies in their own stock and our Help to Rent funding aimed to support these pilots and learn from their experiences.

Since the announcement in October 2017 that the LHA caps would no longer apply to the social sector, there has been less need to set up sharing pilots, although it is clear that sharing can still be a positive housing option for some people. This summary report shares best practice and learning from the funded projects.



Project models

Arch (North Staff) Ltd	Hull City Council
<p>Arch is a charity operating across Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire and Cheshire East. It supports around 6000 children, young people, adults, families and professionals annually in services aimed at reducing social exclusion by ending domestic abuse, tackling homelessness and promoting social inclusion. This includes a successful private lettings scheme.</p> <p>Arch have developed a shared social housing offer across a group of social landlords, using properties that are void or hard to let as a result of welfare reforms.</p> <p>This included configuring and modelling Housing Association properties to make them suitable for sharing.</p>	<p>Hull City Council have been piloting a shared housing project, using larger properties from their own housing stock previously used for families and converting them into shared housing.</p> <p>Some of this they manage themselves, and some stock is leased to partner organisations who act as managing agents. To our knowledge they are the only local authority to trial such a model of sharing.</p>
New Horizon Youth Centre	Newydd Housing Association
<p>New Horizon Youth Centre (NHYC) runs a day centre and outreach programme based in London. They support vulnerable marginalised 16-25 year olds most of whom are in non-priority housing need and require employability support.</p> <p>Working in partnership with Housing Association Network Homes, New Horizon Youth Centre are acting as managing agents for some of Network Homes' stock. NHYC have also provided support to enable young people to stabilise their financial and employment situation, develop tenancy skills, and save for a deposit.</p>	<p>Newydd is a charitable housing association that offers nearly 3,000 affordable homes for rent and sale to people where need is at its greatest in Mid and South Wales.</p> <p>Newydd's Rooms4U project uses existing stock to address the housing needs of single households (including single homeless applicants) on the common housing register by setting up and supporting shared tenancies.</p>



Cross cutting issues

The funded projects have had success at creating shared tenancies in social housing, despite some issues that cut across services and housing markets. It is clear from this funding that the complexities and shortfalls within the welfare system continue to be problematic for homeless households, particularly those under 35 who can only access the shared accommodation rate.

Managing expectations of clients

In housing markets where sharing is not the norm there can be a negative perception through lack of familiarity with shared housing or the prevalence of low quality HMOs and unsupported B&BS, which can then make it difficult for schemes to attract suitable tenants.

Cuts to, and removal of, support services

Projects have found that service users are increasingly presenting with higher support needs or when they are in crisis situations. With the paucity of floating support and reductions in funding and capacity of statutory support services, service users are failing to receive adequate support to prevent their homelessness in the first place or to access purposely commissioned higher support housing.

The roll out of Universal Credit [UC]

The rollout of Universal Credit has had a considerable impact on how Help to Rent projects support their clients. Challenges faced by the projects and impacting on staff's ability to support their clients include:

- Stricter and more complicated UC regulations for ID and proof of address
- Inconsistencies in the way DWP processed applications and in the advice and guidance given to claimants
- Difficulties managing change of circumstances
- Long waiting times for payments, leading to arrears, and the negative impact this has on landlord recruitment and sustainment.

Allocation policies and associated criteria

A further issue surrounds housing/service allocation policies and associated criteria. Projects have reported that applicants are increasingly presenting with failed tenancies and outstanding arrears and are subsequently deemed unsuitable for some accommodation-based services or housing options.

Local Housing Allowance [LHA]

The disparity between LHA rates and market rents continues to prove a major challenge for Help to Rent projects supporting people into private rented sector accommodation. This was also a major concern for those projects piloting sharing in social housing. The LHA caps had meant that social landlords were likely to face a considerable decrease in their incomes (in those areas where the shared accommodation rate was low), and that for many it was not financially viable to use accommodation previously used for families (at social rents) for sharers at LHA, especially considering the additional staff resources which are needed to support shared houses.



Arch North Staffs

Arch have made use of void/hard to let properties, developed a shared housing offer across a group of social landlords and implemented tenant matching. Arch also provided internal training to staff on sharing to ensure that clients expectations were managed at the earliest point of contact.

Initially Arch had intended to work with partner Housing Associations but these providers were reluctant to provide properties after the plans to cap LHA for social housing tenants under 35 were dropped. Arch therefore worked on relationships with the two main local authority areas that they operate in and have been successful in getting both to support the shared project and commit to providing shared properties.

Arch have been successful in ensuring the local authority, and local partners, recognise the value in providing high quality furnished and decorated properties, and the potential effect of this on sustainment rates. One authority has agreed to cover the costs of any void periods as tenants move in/out of the shared house (through DHP) and the other has agreed to pay for all decoration and furnishings in new shared houses set up through the scheme.

As the pilot progressed the initial plan of using shared houses for general needs tenants changed as it has become clear that those referred to the pilot were not properly equipped to deal with their own tenancies. Arch therefore decided to run a 'training flats' model, where young people are helped into more supported shared accommodation for six months before being helped to move into more long term, less supported general needs shared accommodation.

Outcomes

Arch have created 11 tenancies over the last two years.

- 2 tenants have sustained their tenancies for 18 months
- 2 have sustained their tenancies for 1 year or over
- 4 have sustained their tenancies for 6 months or over and
- 3 are currently within the 6 month probation period

Next steps

Arch will continue with their pilot and hope to strengthen existing partnerships with housing associations rather than push for partnerships with others. The shared housing pilot will continue with properties provided by Staffordshire Housing Association and Aspire. Arch are also in talks with the council to transfer their learning from supporting people to be tenancy ready and into shared accommodation to a potential project delivering tenancy training and shared tenancy preparation work with 17-year olds in care.



Hull City Council

Several housing associations have set up shared tenancies in their own stock, but Hull City Council (Hull CC) is the first local authority to do so and have found it is a financially viable model to run as they can charge more to three people at the shared accommodation rate than they would have charged to a family at social rents.

A problem facing many providers looking to set up shared tenancies is the lack of buy-in from the wider organisation. Hull have managed to overcome this and have succeeded in making the case for this project internally, through analysing existing stock, highlighting the number of hard to let 2-3 bed properties and the fact that there was no tangible offer to under 35 year olds.

Elected members have been vocal and influential about the need to do something about homelessness, particularly given the very visible Salvation Army hostel in the city, and have therefore been more receptive to innovative ideas.

Four of the properties managed by Hull CC are occupied by 9 tenants. Outcomes so far are very positive with no arrears, service charges paid, no anti-social behaviour or issues within the shared households. The tenants are supported by two support workers from the Targeted Youth Support team; they visit tenants weekly, complete "outcome stars" with tenants, and hold house meetings once or twice a month. They also provide ongoing ad hoc support to tenants and tenancies. Hull CC believes that the success of the project in their own stock can be attributed to the two workers they have dedicated to sharing.

The partner leased properties have been slower to get off the ground as Hull CC have found it difficult to source properties ready for sharing and have had to convert some stock. Hull CC therefore offered properties which had not been renovated which partners could complete work on themselves, which the partners accepted.

Outcomes

- 18 tenancies have been created so far
- The current age range of tenants is 16-21 and tenants are being referred from Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, Targeted Youth Support and the Leaving Care Team
- Current Tenants are from a range of demographic backgrounds

Next steps

Hull have 17 properties earmarked for the sharing scheme with more properties coming to the scheme, with a view to having 30 properties for sharers by the end of March 2019 when the pilot will be reviewed. They have a number of applicants on the waiting list who have completed tenant matching and tenancy training and will move into properties as soon as they are available.



New Horizon Youth Centre: Project Vista

The funding for New Horizon Youth Centre has been provided by The Berkeley Foundation.

New Horizon Youth Centre has taken on (as managing agent) clusters of accommodation in blocks from Network Homes. These are rented to young people in precarious employment or who are about to start working on a licence agreement for 12 months. During this time they are supported to improve their financial and employment situation, develop tenancy skills, and save for a deposit before moving on to longer term housing in the private rented sector, or moving to more long-term accommodation provided by Network Homes.

The project also offers young people the opportunity to benefit from a 'rent relief' scheme which offers a reduction on rent as the young people move into employment. This has helped to minimise rent arrears while the circumstances of young people's lives change.

Out of all the projects New Horizon Youth Centre have experienced the most issues with tenants moving to Universal Credit, and managing this alongside zero hour contracts and young people's fluctuating work hours. New Horizon Youth Centre have now set up an online portal access with the local housing benefit office, making it much easier to check on payments, which is particularly useful as so many residents have flexible income patterns.

Having accessed stable accommodation, a few residents have successfully applied for university and New Horizon Youth Centre are working closely with these young people to ensure that they will not have to decline their enrolment or get into rent arrears because of the affect this will have on their benefit entitlement. Many young people in the project improved their employment circumstances.

Outcomes

- 53 tenancies were created in total
- 33 reached 6 month target
- 18 have reached one year target

Of those not reaching the 6 month or one year target, the majority had a positive move on to either alternative PRS accommodation or a return to the family home.

Next steps

The success of this project has meant that NHYC have secured a second partnership with another housing association who will be providing additional units for their young people, meaning the young people will be able to exercise more choice in their housing.

"I can't put in words how important having my own space is. Now I have some stability in my life, the only way is up and I can only see good things happen from now on."
Abu, Network Homes tenant



Case study: Abu

As is the case with so many young people who experience homelessness, Abu (19) grew up in a family that had suffered severe and multiple traumas, causing difficult relationships between family members. With tensions rising high at times, he was asked to leave the family home and found himself with nowhere to go. After a period of hidden homelessness, staying with friends, he accessed New Horizon Youth Centre.

Not studying or working at the time, Abu was keen to get involved with the specialist Employment, Education and Training (EET) team at the centre. He also used other services such as ESOL and independent living skills workshops. As he was engaging very well and busy building up experience, writing CVs, and looking for jobs, the team felt Abu would soon find work. However, with long waiting lists for hostel accommodation and prohibitive PRS costs, his housing situation was still very unsettled, halting the process of securing employment. Therefore, when a place at New Horizon's own accommodation provision became available, Abu welcomed the offer to move in.

During his assessment, Abu had already identified that he would need to learn more about cooking and paying bills, so we supported him with this as well as with updating this Universal Credit claim. However, when Abu first moved into his own room, he started to struggle a bit, as many young people do when finding themselves in a safe place for the first time. Abu became reluctant to engage with the support available, and stopped looking for the work he really wanted.

Using years of expertise working with vulnerable and homeless young people, the team soon succeeded in helping Abu identify where his problems were coming from and the steps he wanted to take to next, including talking with the counsellor at the centre. Abu also started to tap into the informal peer support of his housemates.

Soon enough Abu was focusing on this goals and looking for the best ways to achieve his dreams. And after an intensely competitive recruitment process, Abu has recently secured a prestigious apprenticeship in the area of his career interest. He is really looking forward to starting and feeling positive about things to come.



Newydd Housing Association: Rooms4U

Newydd Housing Association are using their own stock to provide sharing solutions for under 35s. They are managing the properties as well as providing support to tenants including tenancy training and financial guidance.

Sharing in general is not commonplace in Wales, especially in The Vale where Newydd operate. Applicants' experiences of shared housing had mostly been in temporary accommodation, and experiences of this were generally negative. Early in the project Newydd recognised the need for robust tenant matching protocols and tenancy ready training. Newydd have also managed to support over 50% of their tenants in the pilot to accrue significant credits on their rent account. This is in preparation for moving into employment/moving onto Universal Credit or moving into Private Rented accommodation.

Newydd allocations policy has been adapted to minimise anti-social behaviour, which had at times caused issues within shared tenancies. This experience has demonstrated that sharing is not suitable for all young people under 35, and Newydd changed and tightened their referral processes accordingly.

Some tenants with complex needs needed additional support at the beginning of, and throughout, their tenancies. However, because the Rooms4U project could flex their allocations policy, and the type of tenancies they offered (moving from joint tenancies to individual licences) they were able to minimise housing management issues and input, allowing project workers to work more closely with individual tenants on accessing education and qualifications, and crucially minimise the risk of evictions.

Outcomes

- 25 tenancies created
- 21 have reached 6 month target
- 14 have reached one year target

Other outcomes for Rooms4U sharers

- Tenants in Newydd's Rooms4U project were asked to score out of ten how much they agreed with the statement: *'I know everything I need to know and feel confident that I could manage a tenancy of my own'*. 90% of tenants rated themselves in the higher end (6-10) following the Tenancy Ready Training and having lived in shared housing

Next steps

Newydd Rooms4U currently have 13 tenancies for this funding period and are continuing to allocate void rooms. The project has been extended to March 2019 and Newydd is looking to expand to 25 shared properties.



Case study: James

Jackie, one of the Newydd's Community Regeneration Officers has worked closely with Rooms4U sharer James to help him access employment and training. He has attended evening classes to obtain certificates in dog walking and animal care, and a stewarding qualification. This gave James additional employment opportunities, so that he could work in the evenings and weekends to help increase his income. James is now completing a course in Counselling at college to take forward his idea of setting up a social enterprise and recently secured a job as a support worker.



Key principles

For sharing in social housing programmes:

The pilot projects listed in this report each achieved outcomes at different levels, but what has been particularly helpful is the learning that has come from their experiences. The success points in these projects derive from these key principles:

- Access to good quality properties and strong relationships with other social landlords from the outset to increase the pool of available properties and offer potential tenants genuine choice
- Genuine buy-in at different levels across the organisation and the partnerships, and shared service level agreements can enable both parties to use their strengths and expertise to best manage properties and support
- Working collaboratively with partners and local organisations and having a dedicated point of contact for landlords/partners to promote and maintain good working relationships
- Good communication and successful support relationships with tenants. Dedicated support workers who can work with tenants on improving their wellbeing, education and employment prospects or situation is vital in encouraging tenancy sustainment and successful move on to PRS accommodation. Positive relationships forged with support workers have had positive longer-term impacts for tenants
- Empowering tenants to manage finances and tenancies successfully could be done through tenancy training, peer support and/or setting out a time limited support agreement which can be extended if necessary
- Thorough pre-tenancy financial and references make a big difference to tenancy sustainment and reducing project risks.
- Encouraging tenants to make savings to protect themselves against welfare/employment changes, or other training models such as arranging monthly house meetings or nominating a lead tenant
- Tenancy matching is key to the success of shared tenancies and can use referrals from partners that include basic information to outline needs and history, introductory meetings with no obligation from either side, tenant matching interviews and questionnaires, and/or accompanied viewings
- Encouraging young people to think about their finances gives them a 'close to real life' experience should they wish to access PRS accommodation
- Small shares (with 4 people maximum) can make a lasting difference in tenancy sustainment



Awards

NHYC's pilot with Network Homes ('Project Vista') won the **London Homelessness Awards in 2017**.

Newydd's Rooms 4U project won the **Pat Chown 'Capturing Creativity' award 2017**.

Further reading

Sharers toolkit

<https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/housing-resource-centre/housing-centre-guides/sharers-toolkit/>

Spare to share toolkit

<https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/housing-resource-centre/housing-centre-guides/spare-to-share-toolkit/>

Council tax in shared housing:

https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/236940/factsheet_council_tax.pdf

Key principles for Help to Rent projects

https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/236951/prs_key_principles.pdf

Contact

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