



# Crisis Local Authority Practice Network

**Practice Exchange Session 16/12/2020  
Winter Planning/CV19 Second Wave**

## Notes from Practice Exchange 16/12/20

### Theme: Second wave/winter planning

#### Topics

1. Hotel Procurement
2. Funding.
3. Staff wellbeing.

#### Actions:

Share Good Homes Standards: Available [here](#)

Share agreement with National Probation Service and Homelessness Reduction Board: Available [here](#)

Circulate notes and send invitation for future meetings

#### Local Authorities in attendance:

- Leeds
- Manchester
- Central Bedfordshire
- Norwich
- LB Hillingdon
- Durham
- Gravesham
- LB Southwark
- Coventry
- Liverpool
- Newcastle
- Sheffield
- South Northants
- LB Lewisham
- Stoke
- BCP
- Kettering

Due to attendance levels – topics were tackled in three sub-groups – below of the summary of the discussions from all three groups.

## 1. Hotel Procurement/Securing hotel contracts/Managing hotel relationships

### What has worked for Local Authorities:

- Block bookings worked well and gave the LA autonomy and gave hotel steady revenue stream and allowed LA to put up signage, deliver food and encourage discussions around evictions.
- SLA signed to formalise agreement between LA and Hotel.
- Long term contract prevented neighbouring LAs using hotel without liaison; kept local business going – hotel was key partner
- Secured large (80-90 room) apart-hotel complex with self-contained rooms/cooking facilities; commissioned providers delivered 24/7 in-house support (Riverside and Salvation Army) and Skylight staff at Crisis did onsite assessments.
- In-house support and in-reach assessment worked very well; many providers responded to email sent out from senior LA figure to retail sector at beginning of pandemic re: need for hotels; 750 people have been rehoused since July
- Support of deputy Council leader really helped, even where local councillors were less supportive
- Changing conversation really helped – presenting offer as huge opportunity and promoting local business contribution to the community rather than focusing on the challenges – advise to speak to Comms team to ensure positive spin; ensure clear structure of what can be offered to hotels is in place
- Keeping all hotels in one place proved to be successful
- Adding in freeview and fitness passes/equipment to keep residents motivated and occupied seemed to work
- Found better results with serviced apartments than with hotels – offering a no strings attached model. It provided a better standard of accommodation with cooking facilities and had better results with the cohort in this accommodation than hotels.

## Hotel Procurement/Securing hotel contracts/Managing hotel relationships cont..

### Challenges/things to consider:

- Political/mediakickback impacted hotel reputation
- Hotels in one street led to “untold issues” – ASB, having to pay 24-hour security, reaction from local businesses and residents
- Seeking new premises, has proven hard, even when support and security staff are offered; student accommodation also not worked
- Staff in hotels threatening to resign if used for homelessness purposes as has heard about issues with the client group
- Student accommodation was old fashioned not fully empty of students and unsuitable layout for client group; police vetoed use of other accommodation as said it was a student area
- Small LA has to do all aspects itself whereas large LA has procurement team (who can “sell” better than options staff)
- Local Newspaper coverage important to consider
- Some residents left negative Tripadvisor feedback – which has angered hotels.

### Points to note/actions/further discussions:

- No-one seemed to have an arrangement with a chain hotel – so raises a question about how groups of LAs might try and broker deals collective
- Needs have changed now compared to threshold, changing the risk assessments and working agreements difficult to get that support from other services eg. Mental health, due to cuts and lack of resources.

## 2.Funding

### What has worked for some Local Authorities:

- secured “containment management outbreak fund” monies (£15k) for nightly paid accommodation for cold weather – has been good though limited solution
- considering applying for infrastructure funding to co-locate all projects together
- has funded a lot via its own resources to get round these issue; trying to improve coordination of monies and funding and not only look to central Government but also to business partnerships and other opportunities
- have commissioning team who write bids which gives less pressure; feed back to MCHLG weekly – they are sympathetic but unlikely to change anything
- Noted the positive that flexible housing support grants will be in allocation
- Believe this must be how the voluntary sector feels/deals with funding. Could get some feedback and tips from them as to good ways to manage.
- Large local authority noted that they are able to provide more intense than usual support due to the additional funds they have been allocated
- Using funding to provide additional properties for single person accommodation and acknowledged that as small authority this is possible but may not work when scaled up.
- LA providing staffing costs from core budget to provide more stability for separately funded projects

## 2.Funding

### Challenges/things to consider

- LAs having to employ bid writers is not good use of money, small LAs don't have this facility and officers don't have expertise (gave evidence to Parliament on this); some funding options do not suit smaller areas or fit what they think they need
- Too many funding opportunities – endless and relentless; all different, with different outcomes and monitoring requirements i.e. Next Steps, Future Funding, Clinical Commissioning Group - all takes up lots of staff time and have to try to weave the projects together behind scenes which is also tricky
- Funding was related to particular client groups and also had to navigate layers of coordination for same reason; narrative of having to be grateful for funding but short-term funding with diverse monitoring requirements doesn't work – needs to be long-term, more flexible and suited to the local area
- Applied for funding for staff member but takes 6 months to get someone in post in an LA so cannot make best use of funds
- If do not already have staff in LA, funding is a write-off; Next Steps funding timescales doesn't allow ambitions to be fully realised (i.e. buy and refurb 21 flats for rough sleepers by March 2021) – goalposts too narrow and timescales too short to make legacy changes, if had time could do much more; staff unsure if will have jobs come March
- Difficult to take a strategic approach as system is so fragmented
- Making future plans for years to come is very difficult

### Points to note/actions/further discussions:

- Main issues raised were felt by all – significant funds are being thrown around but potentially good ideas are being shelved and long-term outcomes not serviced because of time limits, multiple application and spending timescales.
- Though one LA said they were "broke", the issue of not enough funding wasn't raised again - only of the complexity, relentlessness and restrictedness of current funding opportunities and what they require.

### 3. Staff wellbeing

#### What has worked for some Local Authorities:

- Started weekly staff bulletin- including explaining actions or process which started during the pandemic (i.e. Panel for more complex cases); positive news – this has improved morale as people feel more informed/included and reassured
- Weekly huddle every Monday or Friday – see how people doing or what support they need; every officer has weekly support session; 2 senior managers available twice week for staff to discuss casework etc; offer face to face appts for clients who must be seen or need documents verified
- Fortnightly message from Chief Exec has been useful, giving updates on staff, local population and cases, campaigns; staff able to work
- Have duty manager available daily – staff can call if have insistent client; also have weekly Chief Exec bulletin;
- Moved online but still use of safe spaces to meet i.e. pharmacy rather than relying on LA buildings
- Allowing staff to come in one day per week has really helped
- Out of hours quizzes, Christmas bingo, surveys to check morale, set up buddy system, reiterate messages about welfare, time off and mental health, less formal meetings, regular awards, taking lunch together, going for a walk, virtual training
- Tried to provide socially distanced f2f meetings.
- Important to remind people they are saving lives – Everyone In has given staff a chance to really engage with people in an intensive way which is very motivating.
- New ways of working present an opportunity to work smarter. Staff are working harder and performance has never been better,
- Staff helped by applying more robust structure. Offered support to staff for this and with their diaries.
- Headsets offered to staff along with better home working equipment to keep work away from other home functions.
- Send around staff appreciation notes - widen this to whole team to boost morale.

## Staff wellbeing

### Challenges/things to consider

- Found hard to engineer social contact which occurs naturally in office, no space for small talk and managed online spaces don't always work – affects sense of team
- Not being in office nevertheless has taken toll on staff – especially for those who are “people person”; if staff get difficult call, that has come into own sanctuary and support isn't onsite; LA needs to improve technology to meet digital challenges
- Weekly case review sessions were offered but staff didn't take up – longer this goes on, may look at again as the pandemic dynamics keep changing; some real issues with people working from home – staff becoming unwell but depends on person
- Staff working out of hours at home including at night etc, challenging
- Some LAs seeing staff taking 50% less annual leave – not good for mental health and problems anticipated at end of holiday year
- New staff missing opportunity for information, peer chat and chance to ask questions.

### Points to note/actions/further discussions:

- Share staff survey on wellbeing across network (find it here)



#### 4. Final comments

- Next meeting date and time tbc in New Year. Please contact [lisa.naylor@crisis.org.uk](mailto:lisa.naylor@crisis.org.uk) if you have any topics you would like to submit for discussion.
- Crisis to provide Newsletter in January
- Thank you to all who attended - fantastic turnout and some interesting discussions.

#### Actions

Lisa to circulate notes and send invitation for future meetings in the New Year.

# Thank you



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