

homing in

Newsletter of the Scottish Youth Housing Network

No 38 January 2002

Communities Scotland takes over with wider remit

Communities Scotland took over from Scottish Homes in November, but with a broader remit. The agency will focus on Regeneration, Regulation and Inspection, and Investment and Performance.

It keeps its Edinburgh headquarters and seven offices around the country, including those in Inverness, Glasgow, Paisley, Dundee and Aberdeen.

For the first time it will regulate and inspect all the social housing in Scotland, and each council's homelessness function.

Better links

The agency will advise Ministers on the national housing investment programme, and it will manage initiatives such as the New Housing Partnerships, Rough Sleepers and the Central Heating Initiative.

It hopes to make better links with voluntary organisations and the private and public sectors to tackle issues related to the social economy.

It will also work on Supporting People and assist local authorities in the preparation of Local Housing Strategies. ▶

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Scottish Throughcare
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'Information must be accessible to all' was the message from young people at the Network consultation day at Discovery Point in Dundee

Young people tell it like it is . . .

Young people's views on the housing, education and leaving home resources available to them were sought in a recent consultation event organised by the Scottish Youth Housing Network.

Their ideas and opinions were gathered as part of a review of the booklet *I'm Offski* which was last published in 1997. The Network is revising and reprinting it for 2002.

For the new edition to reflect the experience of young people and professionals who produce and use leaving home guides it made sense to organise a consultation event.

Dundee was the preferred location, and aptly Discovery Point was the venue. The day brought together 71 young people from across the country

for a day of workshops and discussion looking at the content, style and format of such resources.

On content, the young people felt that a resource should contain information beginning when someone is considering leaving home, right through to what to do in a crisis.

Contact priority

It was strongly emphasised by the young people participating that whilst receiving information from a booklet is fine, it is no substitute for talking to an advice worker. Priority should therefore be given to contact information.

On style, the keywords were "simplicity" and "comprehensibility". On format, discussion encompassed everything from

key rings to board games to 24-hour drop-in cafes to web sites. The main message was that above everything else, the information must be accessible to all.

The day was a great success, and this was overwhelmingly due to the contribution made by the young people who participated.

We are pleased to announce that as well as the ideas generated for the next *I'm Offski* the information gathered will be fed into the Homelessness Task Force.

The report will also be circulated to all Scotland's local authorities and to Communities Scotland and will be fed into the Scottish Executive's guidance which will be issued under Section 2 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001. ▶

Visiting ONE port of call

Integrated benefits service assessed

ONE is a new service for delivering benefits to working-age people. It brings together the Employment Service, the Benefits Agency and local authorities to deliver a more integrated benefit service with a single point of entry. Claimants have a personal adviser offering a work-focused service tailored to their needs.

Three models are being piloted in 12 areas: a Basic Model; a Call Centre Model; and a Private/Voluntary Sector Model. Since April all new and repeat claimants in the pilot areas must participate. The ONE Evaluation has been designed to ensure lessons are learned for Jobcentre Plus, the new agency which aims to improve the way support is provided to claimants of working age.

A report by the Department for Work and Pensions explores the delivery of ONE in its first year. It is based on interviews with personal and start-up advisers; ONE support staff and benefit experts; managers,

partners and other stakeholders; and observational case studies.

The main findings are:

- From the outset frontline staff have been positive about the integrated and client-centred focus of the ONE vision, and committed to providing an improved service to customers.
- Staff from the three agencies were working very well together. There was a supportive atmosphere and a sharing of knowledge. Benefit experts were a valued source of support. The teamwork which ONE has fostered, with its own identity and the exchange of expertise and division of labour, made possible by the range of competencies in ONE teams has been essential to its success to date.
- However staff felt that their training had been inadequate and that back-up systems – both infrastructural (eg poor ICT) and organisational (eg management) – were hindering their ability to deliver a work-focused service.

Personal Advisers are enthusiastic about their role in principle and when things go well, in practice. But they are consistently frustrated by routine activities and the daily throughput of clients and feel unable to provide the tailored, client-centred service and undertake the case-loading and referral activities of ONE.

Personal adviser interviews are dominated by benefits, with benefits processing being dealt with before work-focused activities. However, where expert benefit support was provided, this enabled personal advisers to achieve most on the work front, and also reassured clients their benefits were being dealt with.

Staff sometimes lacked knowledge and experience of specific types of client needs and the practical interventions that might be possible.

Delivering a work-focused service: Interim findings from the ONE Case Studies and Staff Research is available from Jim Hughes on 020 7962 8562. ▶

Gas alert for first-time renters

Carbon monoxide gas is a silent but deadly killer. This is the message aimed at first-time renters in a hard-hitting publicity campaign launched recently by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

The campaign features posters showing a coffin at the heart of a gas fire with messages including: "You thought it was suffocating living with your parents" to assure first-time renters such as students and other young people that they have the law on their side when they ask landlords to provide evidence that gas appliances have been properly checked.

By law all landlords must have gas appliances including heating systems checked annually by an installer registered with

CORGI, the Council for Registered Gas Installers.

All tenants – existing and prospective – are urged to ask their landlord for a copy of the gas safety check record and to ensure that it is properly signed and dated.

There were 24 deaths last year as a result of carbon monoxide poisoning. Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are easily mistaken for flu.

The campaign has been using inner city bus interiors and internet banner advertising, as well as young people's magazines and consumer titles to get the danger warning across.

Free advice is available from the HSE Gas Safety Advice Line on 0800 300363. ▶

Tell-tale signs of carbon monoxide poisoning

Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are easily mistaken for flu, especially at this time of year.

Tell-tale signs include:

- tiredness
- drowsiness
- headaches
- chest pains
- stomach pains
- lethargy

Escapes

■ If there is a smell of gas or if a gas escape is suspected, you should immediately shut off the gas supply and telephone the Transco Gas Emergency Freephone number: 09800 111999.

Installers

■ To check if gas installers are registered with CORGI telephone 01256 372300. ▶

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The **Network** and **Homing In** provide the ideal forum for news of youth housing initiatives, problems and events in your area. **All ideas and feedback welcome.**

Contact the **SYHN** c/o SCSH, 5th floor, Wellgate House, 200 Cowgate, Edinburgh EH1 1NQ, tel 0131-226 4382 fax 0131-225 4382.

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Update on transfer of resources to local councils

Major changes in the way care leavers will be funded were proposed last year. The responsibility for financial support is set to be transferred from the social security system to local authorities. But many areas are still being considered and discussed.

A working group has been examining the options and their implications. No start date has been set, though April 2002 is still the favoured start.

Eligibility criteria have still to be set out though it is likely that the main group will be young people who have been looked after and accommodated at or after their school leaving date, are aged 16, are moving to live independently and who have been looked after and accommodated previously for a certain length of time.

Age range

It is also likely that those who return home for a short period, only for this to fail, who then move to live independently will also be eligible. The age range will be 16 and 17 year olds.

Arrangements for access to payments from the local authority have not yet been agreed. Which council the young person presents to may determine who pays, though the preferred option is for the home authority to take responsibility.

The amount payable is likely to be set nationally. And eligibility for free dental, optical treatment and prescriptions is also being considered. ▸

■ SPECIAL FEATURE

Better care-leaver help is Forum's aim



Overcoming barriers at the Breakthrough Conference for young people leaving care

sented this information to the Scottish Executive in May as part of the on-going consultation into improving throughcare and aftercare arrangements for care leavers.

This year will see major change in the way local authorities provide throughcare and aftercare support. The Forum is currently involved in the Scottish Executive's Throughcare & Aftercare Working Group to devise new and revised arrangements for care leavers. There will be new regulations and guidance, to introduce a duty to assess aftercare needs and new arrangements for financial support for 16 and 17 year old care leavers. Scottish local authorities will soon have a new responsibility to provide financial support to 16 and 17 year old care leavers, though no start date has

yet been set. Funding will be transferred from the Department for Work and Pensions. The aim is to provide a better standard of continuing support for care leavers. The Forum hopes that improvements can be made to achieve better outcomes for all young people leaving care in Scotland, no matter where they live.

The Forum eagerly awaits the results of the first piece of major research by York University into throughcare and aftercare provision for young people in Scotland. This has included a survey of all local authorities plus in-depth interviews with over 100 young people in three areas. Interviews with support workers and policy makers were incorporated to give an in-depth picture. The Forum will circulate the outcomes.

For more about the Forum and recent developments, get a copy of the latest Annual Report. An on-line version is also published on their website, where you can keep up with the latest developments and information in Forum Online at www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk. You can contact the Scottish Throughcare & Aftercare Forum at: 2nd Floor, 37 Otago Street, Glasgow, G12 8JJ, Tel: 0141 357 4124, Fax: 0141 357 4614. ▸

The Scottish Throughcare & Aftercare Forum aims to improve support for young people leaving residential or foster care. It is involved in a wide range of activities across Scotland that bring people together to explore issues, share good practice and raise awareness of the needs of care leavers during their transition to adulthood.

Regular contact is maintained with practitioners, service providers, policy makers and young people. Its activities include disseminating information on relevant developments, participating in policy discussions, consulting young people and practitioners, distributing publications and organising events.

Last March the Forum helped to organise the Breakthrough Conference for young people leaving care. Held in Fife, it saw 43 young people and 40 adults come together for one and a half days of activities and workshops on the theme of leaving care. Young people from across Scotland had the chance to share their views, learn something new and make new friends. Video and "graffiti walls" were used to convey young people's messages about leaving care. Two young people then pre-

Abuse freefone

TWO projects in Dundee now offer support for young people under 18 who have been sexually abused. A 24-hour freefone advice service is available on 0800 731 4080. Practical, legal and medical information, free pregnancy testing, books, leaflets and face to face support are all on offer.

The service for young men is called the BOYS Projekt, and the service for young women is called the Young Women's Centre. Both are based at 1 Victoria Road, Dundee DD1 1EL. For more information contact the staff on 01382 206222.

Positive news

POSITIVE Action In Housing has introduced a free electronic newsletter which targets housing, voluntary and black and minority ethnic sectors. If you want to be added to their free email newsgroup list get in touch with them.

To have your vacancies or news included send your info to: lorna@paih.org. A small charge is made for adverts.

noticeboard

Homing In Conference, 10 May 2002

The Network is inviting Cathy Jamieson MSP, Minister for Education and Young People, to hear the views of young people and respond to their comments. The programme will also include sessions on Supporting People; housing education; young people as single parents; welfare benefits; and leaving-care issues. Cost is £75 to subscribers.

Contact PAIH at 98 West George Street, Glasgow G2 1PJ, tel: 0141 353 2220, fax: 0141 353 3882. You can also visit them at www.paih.org.

the English organisation, First Key, at www.first-key.co.uk.

The Regard database is freely available at www.regard.ac.uk. You can explore social science research projects, publications and reports.

Diary date

THIS year's Scottish Housing and Support Conference will take place on 9 and 10 October in the Hilton Dunblane Hydro. Further details out soon.

On the Web

INTERESTED in leaving-care issues? Then visit the Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum website online at www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk and

Swedish link

THE International Union of Tenants in Stockholm has linked its website to the Network's website. They are keen for SYHN subscribers to link up with other youth groups involved in housing in Sweden and the Czech Republic. They can be contacted through Magnus Hammar, IUT, Box

7514, 103 92 Stockholm, Sweden, telephone: 00 46 8 791 0225, email: magnus.hammar@hyresgasterna.se. Their website is at www.iut.nu.

Debt alliance

DEBT on Our Doorstep is an alliance of local activists, voluntary and public sector organisations and groups who are campaigning to relieve the burden of debt on low-income households. They want to see initiatives to eradicate irresponsible and extortionate lending; reform or replacement of the Social Fund and adequate access to grants and loans; and promotion of credit unions and community finance initiatives. Contact Joan Houston, Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office on 0131 622 2278.

Content wanted

ARTICLES, noticeboard items and good quality photographs for future issues of *Homing In*. Contact Norma Jones with your suggestions on 0131 538 8191 or by email to syhn@joa.co.uk. ▀

Work-focused interview rules

Work-focused interviews are currently being piloted across the UK (see P2). The new regulations apply to any person who lives in a pilot area; is not in paid work for more than 16 hours a week; is under 60; and makes a claim for any benefit except a widow's payment or disability living allowance.

A start-up adviser takes basic details, gives claim forms and allocates a personal adviser. The personal adviser deals with all the person's claims from one office and interviews them about their work history, prospects and opportunities.

Most new claimants in the pilot areas must attend a work-focused interview as soon as they claim a benefit. This can sometimes be deferred. Existing claimants may also be interviewed. Lone parents must attend every 12 months. Others must attend if they satisfy the personal capability assessment (the test of incapacity for work); stop getting invalid care allowance; start or stop part-time work; finish a training course set up by

benefits briefing

their personal adviser; or become 18.

In renewal claims for HB/CTB the claimant does not have to be interviewed. People claiming JSA still attend Jobcentres for interviews about their claim and jobseeking activity.

To get benefit claimants must participate in the interview to the satisfaction of their personal adviser and give information about educational qualifications; employment history; vocational training; employment-related skills; any work, paid or unpaid; any medical condition which hinders them from working; any caring or childcare responsibilities. Under 18s stay with the Careers Service.

On a first claim the person gets no

benefit until taking part in an interview. Advisers should check reasons for non-attendance before rejecting a claim or ending entitlement.

If it is decided the claimant did not take part in an interview, all benefit claims are stopped and new claims must be made; if the interview is because of a trigger or is an annual interview for a lone parent, benefit is cut by 20% of the IS personal allowance for over 25s. A claimant has five working days to show "good cause" for failing to attend an interview, before a decision is made. A further month is allowed if they could not reasonably have told the personal adviser within five days. Good cause includes language and literacy difficulties, attending a job interview, and sudden illness.

The penalties are severe: complete removal of entitlement to all specified benefits which may include HB/CTB. JSA claimants can apply for hardship payments. There is a right of appeal, but there is no benefit until the appeal is heard and the decision altered. ▀