

What Makes The Difference? TOOLS and RESOURCES

NAME OF TOOL/RESOURCE: Joint Housing Team Information Oxfordshire

NAME AND REGION OF AGENCY/ORGANISATION THAT DEVELOPED THIS TOOL/RESOURCE:
Oxfordshire Early Years and Family Support

Purpose and Brief Description of Tool/Resource:

An analysis of the need for and process of developing a Joint Housing Team within Oxfordshire.

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**Contact details
for further
information
about this
tool/resource**

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Evidence for the effectiveness/ impact of this tool/resource

**Positive impact of
this tool/resource:**

1. Oxfordshire indicates that the number of care leavers in suitable accommodation has increased since the introduction of the team.
- 2.

Joint Housing Team

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The issue

- Oxfordshire has some of the country's highest levels of youth homelessness. In 2005/06, 250 16 and 17 year olds presented as homeless to the Children and Families Assessment team, with the highest numbers presenting in the City and Cherwell.
- When care leavers become 18 responsibility for their housing switches from the leaving care team to housing authorities. Due to lack of alternatives many care leavers find that they have to present as homeless to housing departments in order to access housing. When they do present as homeless they are often offered temporary accommodation while they wait for up to two years for the offer of something more permanent.
- Between the ages of 16 and 17 Children's social services (Early Years & Family Support) are responsible for the housing of care leavers. In 2005/06 77% were in suitable accommodation.

The response

The joint housing team

- In recognition that housing is not just the responsibility of one agency Oxfordshire have established a 'joint housing team'. Using funding committed by Early Years and Family Support (EYFS), Youth Offending Service and Oxford City Council, a manager for the team was appointed in late November 2006.
- The joint housing team is currently in development but should become operational in July 2007. The purpose of the team is to prevent homelessness among young people and vulnerable families. The team will be made up of 7 FTE workers from EYFS, the City Council and the voluntary sector. The exact targets for the team are still to be established but by developing systems that identify those at risk of homeless, strong assessment and referral processes and robust tracking mechanisms it the team will reduce homelessness among young people and vulnerable families.

Assessing and tracking young people

- Oxfordshire have a joint protocol in place which sets out how the needs of homeless young people are assessed under the different bits of relevant legislation (Homelessness Act 2002 and Children Act 1989, 2000 & 2004). A common monitoring form is used across the county and during 2006/07 about 180 young people were assessed under this joint protocol compared to 250 in 2005/06. Of this 180, 53 were accepted as statutory homeless by housing departments. One reason for the reduction is that through a strengthened assessment process more information is gained about the young person's

circumstances and a wide range of options can be explored to resolve their housing problems, before a referral as statutory homelessness is necessary.

- Each district has an Accommodation Panel which meets monthly. These multi-agency panels track the housing situation of young people and plan the support and housing that is necessary for individuals.

Development of more housing provision

- EYFS have worked closely with a private sector organisation to provide housing and support for care leavers aged 16 and 17 who have a high level of need. Prior to the establishment of Key2 there was a lack of housing for this group whose chaotic lifestyles mean they often struggle to live in shared housing and are evicted. Key2 has successfully worked with many of these young people, supporting them to regain structure in their lives and develop the skills they need to live independently.
- Oxford City Council and EYFS have jointly funded a supported lodgings scheme. This scheme is recruiting householders who are able to provide housing and support for young people in their homes. These placements will support young people who are not ready to live entirely independently. We have recently gained funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government to expand this scheme across Oxfordshire.
- Some care leavers are housed with private landlords and there have been concerns about the standards in some of the properties. We have extended the role of the Accommodation Officer, who previously just worked with the Asylum Team, who is now responsible for ensuring properties are of a decent standard. During 2007 we will be increasing our joint working with Environmental Health in order to improve standards.
- We have negotiated 'move-on agreements' with some district councils to reduce the numbers of care leavers that have to live in temporary housing when they become 18. Through these agreements some care leavers will have access to permanent social housing directly on leaving care.
- EYFS has an agreement with Stonham housing for three one bedroom flats in Oxford. These flats are only available for care leavers and they can remain there until they are 24 – again reducing the numbers in temporary accommodation.

Improved standards

- At the end of March 2007, 92% of care leavers were in suitable housing a much improved situation from 77% in 2005/06. The development of Key2 has contributed to this.