

Valuing People Now: The housing priority

A response from ASL, Housing Options and Mencap

The Association of Supported Living, Housing Options Advisory Service and Mencap all welcome the priority given to housing by *Valuing People Now*. Our collective experience in this area is extensive, and our concern that every opportunity be taken to improve the delivery of housing for people with a learning disability. This has prompted a joint response to the housing priority in *Valuing People Now*.

Introduction

The housing section of *Valuing People Now* provides a valuable starting point to tackle the housing issues facing people with a learning disability. Section Eight in the Consultation helpfully identifies

- ✓ Housing as one of the big priorities (Section 8)
- ✓ Lack of housing opportunity and limited rights (8.1.1)
- ✓ Commitment to change 'campus' health services (8.1.4)
- ✓ Potential impact of Disability Rights and Disability Equality Duties. (8.1.1, 8.1.2, 8.2.2)
- ✓ Ideas for identifying housing needs (8.2.4)
- ✓ Encouragement for use of Low Cost Home Ownership (8.2.6)
- ✓ Problems over housing benefit for private sector rents (8.2.10)
- ✓ Potential for DH, DCLG and Housing Corporation partnership (8.3.1)

What is missing are

- Practical ideas for improving delivery of housing (8.1.1)
- How to provide information and help for families and encouragement for family investment options (8.1.2 and 8.2.3)
- Improving impact of housing allocations schemes and choice based lettings for social housing (8.1.5)
- Use of joint social service and housing assessments for housing/support package (HSACC Act 1990 S47) (8.2.5 or 8.2.11)
- Ordinary Residence and Care Home Registration guidance to provide for a *choice of where and how you live*. (8.1.5 or 8.2.3)

Recommendations to improve the delivery of housing

The consultation paper gives a good picture of the lack of opportunity in housing and positive direction for improving services but needs to suggest ideas for the better delivery of housing. We therefore make the following recommendations below.

1. Help finding housing solutions

People with learning disabilities and family carers receive very little practical help with finding housing. Resources are needed for help with planning for a place to live. There is a shortage of experienced people able to help with housing and support plans and a lack of clarity about how the individual support planning is linked to housing. LDDF locally could be used for:

- Help for individuals and families planning and finding housing and support
- Workshops for families on planning and finding a place to live
- Training in housing for care managers or service brokers
- Building capacity among housing and support providers to offer help with housing solutions

2. Renting social housing

Choice Based Lettings and other allocations schemes is not often user friendly. It is possible to weight the importance of priorities in allocations schemes, provide special help with applications and accessible forms but competition for limited numbers of places is high. The few rights to housing are if you are homeless. Housing allocations schemes may not favour people with learning disabilities if they are living with their own families. The most successful routes to social housing are if social service negotiates access for people with a housing need identified as part of a care assessment. The standard and size of property offered should take account of disability and support needs e.g. if the resident needs to share accommodation with a support tenant or worker.

The Housing Corporation capital programme has been under spending on supported housing. This offers the potential to provide new build accommodation which can offer a variety of extra care type flats and accommodation designed for people with physical disabilities and complex needs not readily available through ordinary housing applications. But there is evidence of schemes failing because of cost comparisons with general needs housing. There is a new Housing Corporation strategy for housing vulnerable people and a willingness to improve partnership working.

- Local authorities need to comply with the S47 (3) Community Care Act 1990 and develop better joint working practice on assessments.
- Social services to agree with housing the weighting given to *health* and *welfare* in the local allocation scheme priorities for social housing including those living in residential care homes or with older carers.
- Social services to inform housing departments of the need for housing development e.g. of special housing for those with physical disability.
- Joint commissioning arrangements are needed to plan for future needs e.g. through the Housing Corporation Programme and for matching capital and revenue funding for housing and support.

- The Housing Corporation grant rates should allow for the funding of reasonable additional costs arising because of someone's disability.

3. Voluntary and private sector renting

Renting in the voluntary and private sector has historically been underused because unsubsidised capital investment from the voluntary sector can result in rents which may exceed the level usually met by Housing Benefit. This includes housing provided by charitable organisations such as Mencap. People with a learning disability are likely to be reliant on benefit for their housing most of their lives. They need a viable, long term housing solution from the new Local Housing Allowance. Their housing costs are likely to be higher than Local Housing Allowance to allow for - their need for a particular location to maintain social or family links, room for staff, extra space, amenity or equipment.

- Agreement is needed with DWP on the discretion to meet higher rents required for reasons of disability. There needs to be a safety net which enables people with a learning disability to access the housing they need at a reasonable cost if social housing is not available. Valuing People Now gives key principles for this safety net.
- Local housing allowance to allow for additional costs of housing for those with disability for reasons of location, space, facilities etc.
- Use private property under leasing schemes to reputable social and voluntary sector landlords. This would give more security and affordable rent levels.
- Accredited landlord schemes could also be encouraged.

4. Ownership and family investment

Many authorities are unaware of the potential to use low cost home ownership for people with disabilities. The opportunities for families to help with investment in housing are not recognised in Valuing People Now.

- Every area needs a housing association able to advise and offer low cost home ownership for people with disabilities. The Housing Corporation could supervise.
- The ceiling for Income Support for Mortgage Interest loan payments should be raised from £100,000 with an increase to reflect house price increases since it was set in 1995.
- Family or charity investment potential could be encouraged by guidance on the application of DWP rules on *commerciality and contrivance* with reference to renting to disabled relatives which can discourage families using their own money to provide a home. This does not need a change of the regulations.

5. Reducing use of residential care homes

Although Valuing People pointed toward the use of mainstream housing solutions there is recent evidence the CSCI *State of Social Care* that the provision of care homes continues to predominate over the use of ordinary housing. If this is to change:

- There needs to be some correspondence between DH aims and CSCI practice over registration of care homes.
- Residential care homes offer a joined up accommodation + support package, housing + support needs to be able to offer a co-ordinated response too.
- Ordinary residence rules need amendment and new guidance.
- Practical difficulties over capacity and tenancy that have followed the Mental Capacity Act 2005 need urgent attention.

6. Funding for support, social care and health service funding

The CSCI report *The State of Social Care* highlighted the problem of the numbers of people not deemed eligible for services. There have been some awful cases of neglect and abuse. People with a learning disability are commonly vulnerable for reasons of their disability and this should be recognised in the application of Fair Access to Care criteria.

There are still some tensions and lack of co-ordination between Adult Service commissioning and Supporting People. There is also a risk to higher levels of Supporting People Grant for people with learning disability with the removal of the ring fence and incorporation into Local Area Agreements.

In Valuing People the level of health funding in adult services was estimated at £1.4bn. The substantial health capital investment in accommodation for people in health services or health resettlement services needs to be retained when these may need to change, be re-provided or improved. It is estimated there are about 35,000 older hospital resettlement services. The recent announcement of changing responsibilities for commissioning social care need to take this into account.

- Access to housing often depends in practice on eligibility for social care funding. It is essential if we are to improve the record on promoting independence.
- Existing funding needs to be defended and some understanding reached about the integration of social care and SP grants in individual budgets.
- Joint Commissioning arrangements should be adopted where people have both housing related support and general social care needs.
- Local Authorities should ensure that Independent Living Performance Indicators are adopted and links made across corporate business areas.
- There are a large number of older health funded services needing change or improvement. There is potential for partnership arrangements making use of a mix of S28A transfer funding, social housing grant and private finance which could succeed the current efforts going into Campus Closures.

Conclusion

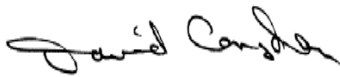
We would recommend that these outline points form the basis of an Action Plan for housing for the joint DH, DCLG panel. Our organisations would be prepared to work on the detail required with others as a Housing Reference Group.



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