



promoting equality in housing
hybu cydraddoldeb ym maes tai



Good Practice Briefing

Equality in Shared Housing

Shared social housing is seen as one of the solutions to the shortage of affordable housing, but what does this mean for equality and diversity?

Key issue

The proposal to set a standard rate in single bedroom shared accommodation meant that those under 35, single and with no children claiming Housing Benefit were under threat of being capped at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate.

However, in October 2017, following highly effective lobbying, the UK Government announced in its White Paper that it had scrapped its plan to apply LHA rates to social housing.



Prior to this announcement, shared housing had been explored by many as a means of mitigating the impact of this proposal. Irrespective of changes to the implementation of the new funding mechanism, we can still expect to see shared housing become more common and increasingly adopted by many providers as

a means of supporting young people to live independently.

Shared living can also suit many young people used to sharing during university and looking to continue living with friends and pooling resources.

Preference vs Prejudice

Having a thorough and clear picture of who your tenants are is a vital part of the preparation for finding them a suitable place. Many organisations put a lot of time and care into profiling their prospective tenants, gathering information not only on their protected characteristics and lifestyle, but the type of person they are willing to share with.

Getting this right first time can have a dramatic and positive impact on tenant's well-being, and as a consequence lead to a decrease in the number of complaints, instances of ASB and levels of rent arrears.

However, staff must be aware of the fine line between preference and prejudice. Can tenants request to only live with male or female tenants? What if they cite religious reasons for their preferences?

This is a very difficult area that needs careful management by staff overseeing the process.

Case Study - Bron Afon Homeseeker+ Project

Addressing specific need-creative approach

With support from the Home-Seeker Partnership, Bron Afon has been running a pilot project to test a package of housing and support options for single young people. The measures they trialled aimed to mitigate the effect of the intended cuts to Housing Benefit for singles under 35 that were due to come into force with the extension of the Local Housing Allowance to social housing.

The project has focussed on new ways to deliver housing services for young people, through a mix of housing allocations and support solutions:

Solution 1 – standard introductory tenancy without support.

Solution 2 – conditional shorthold tenancy with support.

Solution 3 – joint introductory tenancy without support (shared housing).

Solution 4 – standard assured tenancy without support.

Solution 5 – housing options advice and signposting.

In all cases, the aim is to work with young single home seekers and encourage them to attend the interactive '**Homeseeker+**' pre-tenancy workshops. These workshops are designed to give home seekers a good understanding of what to expect from a social housing tenancy and what they need to do to be 'tenancy ready'.

Each workshop is split into two parts. The Own 2 Feet Team discusses anti-social behaviour, managing a successful tenancy, how to cook on a budget, and risky behaviours. The Employability Team outlines the support that can be offered through the "That Works Training Academy" and targeted recruitment and training.

In part two, individuals have a one to one pre-tenancy assessment and a personal action plan is drawn up, and, if necessary, the individual is signed up to an employability / intervention programme. This helps to build trust and develop a customer relationship from first contact.



Case Study - Bron Afon Homeseeker+ Project

Pushing boundaries

Through partnership working, Bron Afon has been able to commit specialist knowledge and resources to the pilot to make sure that some of their most vulnerable residents get the support they need to face the challenges presented by Welfare Reform. Early intervention and prevention means the right tenant has been placed in the right tenancy at the right time.

Before and after scenario

Bron Afon has moved from a standard 'one size fits all' housing option to a diverse menu of housing allocation and support solutions for single people under 35. This is designed to ease the impact of welfare cuts on tenants and the business.

One risk with the pilot and its approach to engage young home seekers in pre-tenancy was the possibility of people with complex and high levels of need being denied access to housing. Comparative analysis of the profile of Bron Afon lettings to single under 35s in the six months prior to the pilot and over the six month period of the pilot reveals this has not been the case:

Priority need of applicants before and during pilot

	Pre Pilot	Pilot
Homeless	2%	8%
Gold	31%	36%
Silver	32%	31%
Bronze	35%	25%
All	100%	100%

Homeseeker+ workshops began in November 2016. During the pilot, 155 young people were referred by their Pre-Tenancy, Employability and Lettings Teams and colleagues at Jobcentre Plus and 68 (44%) people went on to attend. Within this figure, referrals made for young people identified by the Employability Team were most successful, with a 61% attendance rate.

This suggests that engaging young people in skills and employment programmes has a big impact when seeking to open up conversations about housing needs and solutions.

Overall, since 'go live', Bron Afon have seen there is increased sustainability and clear monitoring of social value, which allows them to show their social impact, a reduction of people in arrears and the amounts owed dependant on solution.

The pilot has provided support, clarity and accountability to change by focusing on both human and financial impacts. Through changing and adopting processes and procedures and refining practices to meet the needs/demands of applicants, the pilot has given residents the chance to thrive in their tenancy.

To find out more about this project, please contact Michelle Edwards:

michelle.edwards@bronafon.org.uk

Recommendations

Planning - make sure you know what you need to know, and why. After considering the needs arising from an individual's protected characteristics, you also need to think about things like lifestyle, hobbies, outlook and skills.

Train your staff - they need to be able to effectively challenge inappropriate viewpoints. Learning how to observe and interpret body language can be an effective way of reading someone's intentions when addressing sensitive issues. Having the skills to explain what unacceptable behaviour and language is and its impact on others can greatly assist in promoting cohesive, inclusive shared living spaces.

Flexibility - not every tenant will have an obvious match 'on paper'. Staff must be trusted to make decisions and to operate with a degree of flexibility.

House Rules - it is important that all tenants in a shared house feel connected to the property and each other, and facilitating their contribution to formation of the house rules is a great start. Once the rules are

agreed and established, the tenants will have a greater sense of responsibility and ownership.

Normalise - start promoting shared housing as a viable, practical solution for young people.

Balance - it may be more important to match those in high need correctly, rather than quickly. Ensuring tenants are happy and can live together at the outset reduces stress throughout the system.

Alternatives - If someone with complex needs has been turned down many times, consider making them the first tenant assigned to a property and then matching others to fit in around them. Perhaps shared housing isn't right for them, so try to have alternatives and backups in place for such tenants.

Group applications - allow tenants to move as a group. Allowing and encouraging groups to apply together may save a lot of complication and delay in allocating a property.

References

'Fair Share' – equality and diversity in shared housing presentation (Tai Pawb 2017)
The role of housing and housing providers in tackling poverty experienced by young people in the UK (Cambridge Centre for Housing & Planning Research 2016)
Spare to Share Toolkit (Crisis 2017)

How can Tai Pawb support you?

Become a member! Our members receive advice and support on housing and equality issues, as well as discounted rates for our events, access to our resource library and more.

Tai Pawb also offers equality and diversity training tailored to the housing sector, and support to undertake our prestigious 'QED Award' quality mark.

For more information, or if you require further advice please contact our helpline:

029 2053 7635 | helpline@taipawb.org | www.taipawb.org