

## Tameside Housing Advice



More than  
Homeless

**Tameside Housing Advice** is a modern and customer focused service that extends beyond homelessness. It emphasises the practice of homelessness prevention and we have already started to embrace many of the principles of the Enhanced Housing Options models that are being piloted throughout the country.

We recognise that there are many factors involved in resolving a housing crisis. The solutions to which can only be found through partnerships and multi-agency approaches. What follows is just an insight into what we do and who helps us to achieve this.

**Howard Lomas, Housing Advice Manager**

### Debt Advice

Did you know that we have a Debt Advice service at Housing Advice? It's to help anyone facing homelessness due to debt on rent, a mortgage or any other loan, whether secured on a home or not. The service is delivered in partnership with Tameside Council's Welfare Rights team. It is free, independent, confidential advice and provides support and assistance with debt problems.

#### The service can:

- Check whether clients are getting the correct benefits.
- Draw up a financial statement to see what money is available, if any, to pay creditors.
- Check liability for debts owed.
- Advise on what to pay first.
- Negotiate with creditors.
- Make applications to various trust funds for additional grants.
- Offer representation in the County Court and help complete any court paperwork.
- Give assistance in the Magistrates Court.
- Signpost to other advice agencies/information sources where necessary.



## Domestic Violence Outreach

We work closely with Women's Aid as well as Tameside Women's Project which is a refuge for women who are victims of domestic abuse. We refer victims of abuse for counselling and outreach support both before and after they have fled abuse. There is also a counselling service available for children who have witnessed abuse. We attend Tameside Domestic Abuse Forum and are active in raising awareness of the issue across the borough. We can arrange training sessions for professionals who require training in domestic abuse awareness raising/dealing with disclosure/signposting/keeping safe/and MARAC training/referring.



We are also able to refer people to the Sanctuary Project which aims to assist people to remain in their home by including additional security, home link alarms, police markers etc to the property. We work closely with the IDVA's in Tameside as well as the police Domestic Violence Unit. This leads to our regular attendance at the monthly MARAC meetings which are multi agency meetings held for very high risk cases of domestic abuse. We have a designated person who deals with these cases and who has undergone CAADA's MARAC Champion training which is all in line with the new Home Office 3 YR Plan (Saving Lives, Reducing Harm, Protecting the public – tackling crime).

## Enhanced Opportunities Project

Our Employment and Learning Advocate works with Housing Advice clients to break down some of the barriers to employment that are encountered by those in a housing crisis situation. It's main aims are to:

- Improve awareness and access to employment, training and education advice services.
- Determining short, medium and long term aspirations of the clients.
- Understanding the most effective time to begin to nurture and mentor the client towards meeting those aspirations.

To provide a peer mentor aspect to the Project we have recently appointed a service user to assist the Advocate. This appointment came out of a recruitment exercise that was ring-fenced to service users. Anyone who applied for the job was given some detailed feedback and a mock interview in order to prepare them for future job opportunities.

## Disability Housing Register (DHR)

The Disability Discrimination Act definition defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

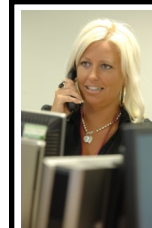


The DHR assists people with disabilities to find suitable registered social landlord properties that meet their disability needs. Their needs are matched against available properties, with additional alterations being made if necessary to ensure all their needs are met.

The service operates as a collaboration between various agencies, including Tameside Housing Register, Tameside MBC (Housing Strategy and Occupational Therapy Teams) and registered providers of social housing operating within Tameside.

During the 12 months to March 2009, 80 applications had been added to the DHR and 65 disabled people had been re-housed.

- 43 via the DHR
- 13 registered providers of social housing general lets
- 6 private rent/purchase
- 3 sheltered/extra care housing



By re-housing people with disabilities in Tameside into adapted properties or properties that better lend themselves to adaptation; it is believed that approximately £172,000 had been saved against Tameside Councils adaptations budget. (08/09)

## Supported Housing Register

In Tameside a successful multi-agency approach is being used to aid the move-on to permanent accommodation of people in supported housing.

But don't just take our word for it as it has received outside endorsement of its achievements. In 2007 as part of the Audit Commission Inspection of Tameside MBC's Supporting People service it said:

“This innovative register is exclusively for the residents of supported housing and floating support schemes. It has nomination agreement with the housing associations operating in the area and nominations are monitored to ensure an equitable profile in terms of size, stock type and location in order to help meet the diverse needs of service users. The scheme is based on a visit by a resettlement worker early in the support period to assess and meet move-on requirements. This is supplemented by a fuller tenancy readiness assessment at a later date, completed jointly by the user and his or her support worker“.

It's worthy of note that that Inspection awarded Tameside 3-stars with excellent prospects of Improvement.

The Supported Housing Register is a full multi-agency approach which involves:

- Joint Move-On Plans being agreed with the Supported Housing provider, Housing Advice and the person in supported accommodation.
- In complex cases the Housing Association providing the permanent accommodation will be brought in at an early stage of the move-On Plan: this could be months before a person is tenancy ready.
- Housing Advice acts as an Advocate between the person in supported accommodation and the registered provider of social housing in order to overcome suspension policies and minimise barriers around past debt or past tenancy history.



- Permanent accommodation is offered up by registered providers of social housing via nomination arrangements.
- The Move-On Plan in many cases enables access to an Independent Living Course delivered by Tameside College and other agencies. This looks at household budgeting, cooking on a budget, benefits advice and tenancy sustainment.
- If required, Housing Advice can facilitate a stepped Move-On approach or procure Tenancy Support once permanent accommodation has been found.

### Case Study

The supported housing register received confirmation a single man in his fifties was 'tenancy ready' and an appointment was booked to see him.

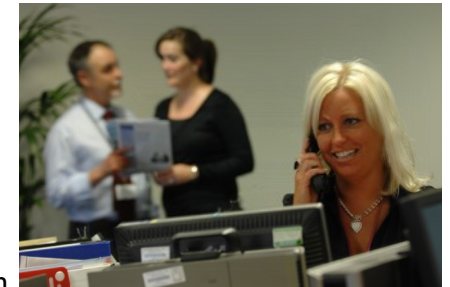
Before moving into the unit he had been street homeless/sofa surfing for a period of 8 years, followed by a period of 8 months in custody. He was a father of two, trying to regain contact with his children.

On arrival it was explained the client was going to have to leave the supported accommodation in three weeks time due to his rent far exceeding his income as his circumstances had changed. The accommodation provider had no option than to issue notice.

The Housing Register interviewed the man and were informed by his support worker they were looking into the possibility of private rent. The issue with private rental was the cost, as it would be unlikely local housing allowance would cover the rent as the client's income was just outside the threshold.

On returning to the office a call was made to a local Housing Association and they had a two bedroom flat coming available within the timeframes the client had. Five references were obtained to support the client application and sent to the Housing Association on the same day.

He was interviewed by the Housing Association the following Tuesday and signed for the tenancy on the Friday, one week after being interviewed.



## A Meeting of MINDS

Housing Advice sessions are also held in partnership with Topaz, which is funded by Tameside, Oldham and Glossop Mind! Topaz is a not-for-profit organisation based in Tameside, which promotes well-being through social engagement and creative opportunities. Topaz works with individuals to achieve their goals and aspirations, promoting recovery, self-management and social inclusion.



## Topaz Cafe—Food for Thought



We have another partnership with Topaz, as they provide healthy/tasty vegetarian food in a relaxing atmosphere. Housing advice clients that are likely to be waiting for some time are given a voucher so they have the ability to go and have a drink and a healthy snack or meal. This is usually in cases where we have

to secure emergency accommodation.

## Prevention Fund

This is a small pot of money which we can use creatively to stop people from becoming homeless. Examples of this can include paying for a family member to look after somebody whilst supported accommodation could be found. We also offer short term loans at 0% interest to clients until community care grants come through or by paying travel expenses to people that need to reconnect with family in other parts of the country.

## Newsletters

Tameside Housing Advice produces a quarterly newsletter which is distributed to key partners and agencies via e-mail. This is to help communications and allow people to have an insight into what new initiatives we are working on. We also send out our quarterly report this way. Please let us know if you wish to be included on the mailing list for future newsletters.



## Private Landlord Scheme

Due to the increasing demand in social housing another prevention method is the Rent Deposit Scheme (RDS). This is promoted to clients as part of a range of housing options offered to combat homelessness in the borough.



Prospective tenants eligible to access the RDS scheme are:

- Households deemed to have a priority need under homelessness legislation.
- Households previously assessed as intentionally homeless.
- Households referred by Probation.
- Those that may need to re-locate for work or support.

The first part of the process involves the Prevention officer carrying out relevant enquiries to determine if the client is eligible. When a client finds a property the prevention officer will carry out a site inspection to ensure it meets decent homes standard, we will also make sure there are current gas and energy performance certificates and agree an inventory for the property.

## Cornerstone Project

This is the scheme run by New Charter in partnership, with the Charity Action for Children, working intensively and in depth with families with chaotic and dysfunctional lifestyles. The excellent work that is done helps stabilise things and gets some very successful results, calming anti social behaviour, dealing with school attendance, preventing homelessness and even intervening to prevent children being taken into care.

It's hard stuff and requires a great deal of tenacity and getting the statutory agencies to do what is needed for the family. It can save massive amounts of public money, family breakdown and care costs can mount up to over £300K for a tough case.



## Service User Inclusion

We regularly engage with current service users to check how we are performing, Topics we have asked for their feedback on include, web-site, leaflets and customer service questionnaire's. We are always keen to involve service users so



we now have a group performing telephone surveys on our behalf to get feedback on key areas of our business by contacting clients that are currently using the advice centre. Training and advice was given beforehand, and these service users are now being linked into the enhanced opportunities programme.



## Life Skills Course

If clients have never held a tenancy before they are encouraged to attend. It is also available for people struggling in current tenancies.

If you wish to apply for one of these courses you will need to speak to your Housing Worker or your Support Worker who can help you with making an application.

Once an application form has been completed they should be sent to the Tameside MBC Housing Strategy team 2 weeks prior to the commencement of the course.

To be eligible to attend the course you will need to have been referred by a Housing or Support Worker and have made a commitment to attend each day of the course.

**What do you get at the end of the course?**

The course is registered with AQA, an independent educational awards body. This means that all participants who complete the course will receive a certificate that recognises what they have learnt.

Local landlords have agreed to view these as positive evidence that you have done some work on understanding the responsibilities of being a tenant and gained some life skills that would help you.

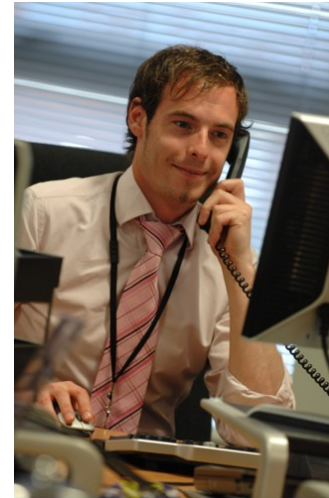
If you have any more queries on the course please contact the Tameside Housing Strategy team on 0161 342 2639 and ask to speak to either Kay Mistry or Colm O'Brien.

### Life Skills Course

Would you like to improve chances of getting your own home quickly?  
Are you already struggling to maintain your tenancy?  
Would you like some help in understanding how to manage your money?



## Move on Planning



For each person or household that is placed in supported/temporary accommodation a move on plan that is "bespoke" to their circumstances will be produced. The move on plan will clearly define any issues they need to address to remove any barriers. This involves a three-way agreement between the client, key worker and a member of Housing Register team based at Tameside Housing Advice.

In more complex cases, a multi agency meeting could be called and these can involve a local Housing Association, where Housing Advice would look to get an "in principle decision" to re house the client if they adhere to agreed action regarding any previous issues.

## Case Study

Client history is that of a young mother with two young children fleeing domestic violence, she had a history of arrears and anti social and abusive behaviour. She had been in a domestic violence refuge for nine months when an interview was carried out by Tameside Housing Register.

The client had over £2000 arrears that she had not addressed with a registered provider of social housing, and was suspended on their list for this and her previous behaviour for a period of two years.

It came to light that she had not appealed the suspension due to the situation she had found herself in. Steps were taken to ensure the arrears were addressed via a payment plan that she could afford.

Her character had changed since being in the refuge and her priority was now her children and moving forward.

Tameside Housing Register assisted the client with overturning the suspension with the landlord by attended the hearing with the client and her support worker and presented her case.

The decision was made to overturn the suspension. Approximately one month after this a nomination was made to the same landlord, with the proviso that the arrears payment plan carried on being adhered to. She signed for the tenancy and moved in and continues to reside there 3 years later.

## Prison Surgery



Once a month, a member of the accommodation team from Tameside Housing Advice goes into Forrest Bank prison which is a category B prison holding 800 male prisoners. Help and advice is given to people nearing the end of a prison term to secure accommodation before they are released.

Therefore helping to achieve National Indicators.

## Probation Surgeries

In addition to the work we do in prison we also work with people that are currently on probation orders. Sessions are held weekly at the two probation offices within Tameside. Discussing client's housing options, we also administer a rent deposit scheme on behalf of the probation service for clients wishing to secure accommodation within the private sector.



- 30% of people released from prison will have nowhere to live.
- 18% of clients in an average homelessness project are prison leavers.
- Ex-prisoners who are homeless upon release are twice as likely to reoffend as those with stable accommodation.
- 35% of Young Offenders aged 16 to 25 felt a lack of accommodation was the factor most likely to make them re-offend.

## Hospital Visits

The third surgery we hold is at the Tameside General Hospital. Securing accommodation is often a key step in dealing with mental health problems.

Discharge planning helps people leaving hospitals to access housing, mental health, and other necessary community services can prevent homelessness during such transitions. Ideally such planning will begin upon entry into hospital and is ready to be implemented upon discharge.

## Young Parents Outreach

Getting out into the community is a great way of engaging with the wider audience. Tameside Housing Advice, in partnership with Regenda Young Parents Tenancy Support, hold two drop in sessions in Ashton and Hattersley. This is where young parents aged 16 to 25 years can call in and receive help and advice on tenancy related issues, accessing social and private landlords and information and referral to young parents floating support service.



At: Hattersley Health Centre  
Hattersley Road East  
In the Dental Waiting Room

### Young Parents Drop-In

- If you are aged 16 to 25 years old and need:
- Help & advice on Tenancy Related Issues
  - Help & advice around accessing housing associations and private landlords
  - Information & referral for Young Parents Floating Support Service

Call in and see:  
Andree Brown:  
Tameside Housing Options Centre: Prevention Officer  
Telephone: 0161 331 2700

Hazel Clarke:  
Regenda Tenancy Support Team Leader  
Telephone: 07739 297 525

**Every 3rd Wednesday**  
Starting Wednesday, 13 May 2009  
1.30pm - 4.00pm

## Case Study

A young mother attended the drop in after she had been told by friends on face-book about the service. She had recently terminated a private tenancy as the house was in disrepair and landlord had doubled her shortfall, which she couldn't afford. Her only option was to sofa surf with her twelve month old baby. This was very unsettling time for her as she was running out of friends to stay with. At the drop in session she was offered temporary accommodation and was put in touch with a private landlord who's rent fell within local housing allowance, no rent in advance or deposit were required. Tenancy support was at this point offered. She viewed and accepted the house over weekend and she signed for the tenancy with her support worker from Regenda, who then assisted with her LHA claim, budgeting etc. She is now settled in the tenancy and attending a full time course at Tameside College and is still receiving tenancy support.

**Tameside Housing Advice, 119/125 Old Street  
Ashton under Lyne, Tameside, OL6 7RL.**

**The office is open to the public 10am to 3pm  
Monday to Friday.**

**Telephone calls 9.00am till 5pm Monday to Thursday  
9.00am till 4pm on Fridays.**

**0161 331 2700 or  
0161 342 2222 out of hours**

**E-mail us at [info@tamesidehousingadvice.org](mailto:info@tamesidehousingadvice.org)  
Or Enhanced Learning at [EOP@newcharter.co.uk](mailto:EOP@newcharter.co.uk)  
Web-site [www.tamesidehousingadvice.org](http://www.tamesidehousingadvice.org)**