

## Housing, Regeneration and Planning

### Evaluation of the local authority housing hubs approach

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Ipsos MORI Scotland and Mandy Littlewood Social Research and Consulting were commissioned by the Scottish Government to undertake an evaluation of the local authority housing hubs approach. Hubs comprising neighbouring local authorities were established in 2010 to help local authorities work together to meet the 2012 homelessness target. They were supported by approximately £500,000 of 'enabling funding' made available by the Scottish Government. This was primarily a process evaluation, focusing on the operational effectiveness of the Hubs. However, the immediate benefits of the Hubs to local authorities were also considered. The evaluation had two objectives: to explore how well these arrangements were working to prevent homelessness and deliver the 2012 homelessness target; and to identify and examine what had worked well in order to develop, promote and share good practice.

### Main Findings

- Overall, Hubs were viewed positively. Specifically, they were felt to have benefited local authorities in two main ways: increasing 'buy in' to the housing options approach by helping to raise the profile of housing options and legitimise and build confidence in the approach; assisting local authorities to work together in the development of housing options approaches through Hub-related projects (paid for by the available enabling funding) and through the sharing of best practice.
- There was an appetite among Hub members for the Hubs to continue beyond March 2012, the end of the original funding period. For this to happen, two key issues would have to be considered. First, the availability of funding for travel to meetings, provision of administrative support and the funding of Hub based ideas and activities. Second, ensuring that Hubs maintain a clear purpose when all the desired outcomes of the Hub and the 2012 Target have been met.
- It was felt that there could be value in rolling out the Hub approach, either to areas related to housing or in other service areas where the challenges faced by local authorities are similar to those which prompted the development of the Hubs. Several factors related to the set up and management of the Hubs were identified as having an influence on the success of Hub working. These success factors point to the following measures that should be taken to ensure maximum benefit is derived from the Hubs model should it be rolled out to other areas:
  - agree general principles at the outset of Hubs around the aims of the process and what Hubs are being set up to achieve
  - ask for volunteer lead authorities who are committed to the work of their Hub
  - ensure that each Hub is made up of local authorities at different stages in the development of services
  - set up formal mechanisms to share information between Hubs
  - hubs should schedule regular and frequent meetings, particularly in the initial development stage of the Hub
  - hubs should recruit administrative support.

## Introduction

The study was primarily a process evaluation, focusing on the operational effectiveness of the Hubs. However, while it could not provide any impact assessment, given the timing and short duration of the research, it does report on the immediate benefits of the Hubs to local authorities. The evaluation had two key objectives:

- to explore how well these arrangements are working to prevent homelessness and deliver the 2012 homelessness target, and;
- to identify and examine what has been working well in order to develop, promote and share good practice.

## Methods

- The evaluation was conducted primarily through qualitative research with all Hub members and a sample of local authority Heads of Service. The evaluation also comprised analysis of the type of contact Hubs had through the Communities of Practice website (a tool set up to encourage the sharing of information across Hubs), and secondary data analysis of national homelessness data.

## Findings

### Benefits of the Hubs

There was evidence to suggest that the Hubs benefited local authorities in two ways:

- **Increasing ‘buy in’ to the housing options approach** particularly among local authorities who had not yet developed, or were in the early stages of developing, their housing options approaches by helping to: raise the profile of housing options; and legitimise and build confidence in the approach.
- **Assisting local authorities in the development of housing options approaches** through Hub-related projects (paid for by the available enabling funding) and through the sharing of best practice – including: learning from more advanced local authorities about what worked well when they were developing their housing options approach; sharing experiences of engaging with RSLs and private landlords; and taking staff on visits to other local authorities to observe the activities of frontline staff who were delivering the approach on a daily basis.

### Key success factors

A number of factors were identified as having an influence on the success of Hub working:

- **Spending sufficient time in the early stages to develop clear aims for the Hub** – Hub members who felt that they had received most benefit from the process were part of Hubs who had met most often in the early stages. Making time to meet in the early stages was central to Hubs getting off the ground and developing clear aims for the Hub.
- **Hubs consisting of local authorities at different stages in the development of housing options** – It was important to the success of Hubs that they were comprised of local authorities at different stages in developing housing options approaches. This ensured that Hub members could share best practice and experiences, and learn from members who were further ahead in the development of housing options.
- **The ‘lead’ local authority being able to make time to carry out Hub activities** – Evidence from Hubs suggested that the suitability and effectiveness of the ‘lead’ was reliant on them being fully committed to the process and making appropriate resources available to carry out Hub-related administrative tasks (in addition to their ‘day job’). ‘Leads’ played an important role in scheduling meetings, facilitating communication between members and ensuring the continuity of Hub activities.
- **Trust, openness and honesty among members** – Trust encouraged members to be open and honest with each other about their local authority’s progress and their concerns surrounding housing options – to “lay their cards on the table”. This helped to facilitate the setting of clear aims for the Hub and was the foundation for sharing information and best practice.
- **Having regular and frequent meetings** – It was central to the success of the approach that Hubs met frequently, particularly in the early stages. This ensured continuity of Hub activities.
- **Having administrative support** – Administrative support was perceived to be essential to alleviate the workload of the ‘lead’ and ensure the continuity of the Hub. Lack of administrative support was identified as a significant barrier to the successful running of the Hub process.
- **Having committed members** – The success of the Hub was reliant upon all members of the Hub being committed to the process by making efforts to attend Hub meetings and sharing the

responsibility of carrying out action plan-related tasks. This way of working helped to share responsibility across members and ensure the continuity of Hub activities. Further, it ensured that the process was not over-reliant on the 'lead' local authority.

### Likelihood of Hubs Continuing

There was a great deal of appetite among Hub members to continue beyond 31st March 2012. There was a feeling that much of the work of Hubs still had to be completed.

Hubs are likely to continue in some form, at least in the short term, beyond 31st March 2012. Hub members identified two ways that the process could be developed to provide greater benefits for members:

- **Engaging external organisations in the Hubs process** – while three Hubs had invited other external organisations, namely RSLs, private landlords and third sector agencies, all Hubs had ambitions to extend the membership of their Hub. The Hub was seen as a potential platform in which to involve external organisations in the homelessness prevention agenda
- **Increasing sharing between Hubs** – while the Scottish Government made efforts to facilitate sharing between Hubs, by creating the Communities of Practice website, the website was not widely used. Hub members were keen for more regular and active sharing of information and experiences across Hubs.

### Factors which may impact on Hubs continuing

It was evident that two issues would need to be addressed for this to be considered. These were:

- **The availability of funding** – without funding, members of one Hub did not believe they would be able to pay for travel from their own local authority's budget. Since some form of administrative support was seen as being very helpful, members felt that it was important to make some funding available for this purpose. Some felt that it was important for the Scottish Government to make some money available to fund Hub based ideas and activities.
- **Hubs maintaining a clear purpose** – some Hub members had doubts as to whether there would be reason to continue in the longer term, when all the desired outcomes of the Hub and the 2012 Target had been met. Therefore, if Hubs are going to continue, their purpose and aims would need to

be restated. This may include their importance to the ongoing development of the housing options approach in all Scottish local authorities

### Replicating the Hubs Model in other service areas

- Hub members and Heads of Service felt that there could be value in rolling out the Hub approach, either to areas related to housing or in other service areas. However, while they felt that many of these individual principles could be used in any service area, for the Hubs model itself to be valid and effective, it would need to be applied to an area where the challenges faced by local authorities are similar to those which prompted the development of the Hubs.

### Best practice guidance

The evaluation is able to offer some insights into how the Hubs model could be best designed. The following measures should be taken to ensure maximum benefit is derived from the Hubs model:

During the setup of Hubs:

- Organisers (e.g. the Scottish Government) and Hub members (e.g. local authorities) should agree general principles at the outset of Hubs around the aims of the process and what Hubs are being set up to achieve
- Organisers should host events/seminars with Hub members to launch the Hubs approach
- Organisers and Hub members should ensure that each Hub is made up of Hub members at different stages in the development of services
- Organisers and Hub members should set up formal mechanisms to share information between Hubs
- Organisers should ask for volunteer 'lead' Hub members that are committed to the work of their Hub

Once the Hubs have been set up:

- Hub members should schedule regular and frequent meetings
- Hub members should have more regular meetings in the initial development of the Hub
- Organisers should make funding available to Hub members to carry out joint project work only after Hubs have had time to develop clear aims
- Hub members should recruit administrative support.

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at [socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or on 0131-244 7560.

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