

**PART B:**

**Specification for**

**Through The Gate Service**

**SS054/2012**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Regional Homelessness Group comprising of representatives from Durham, Sunderland, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, Gateshead, Northumberland, Middleborough, Stockton, Darlington, Redcar & Cleveland and Hartlepool, has been allocated funding from Communities & Local Government to develop services that will reduce single rough sleeping across the region and tackle service users who experience chronic social exclusion.
- 1.2 The Regional Homelessness Group recognised that a significant proportion of rough sleepers across the region, and those users of multiple services, have previously been in custody and have a history of inappropriate, temporary accommodation. There is a core of offenders for who failed accommodation options often result in a return to offending and a cycle of homelessness and social exclusion, which imposes a significant strain on limited accommodation options, the criminal justice system and the National Offender Management Service. A report produced by Homeless Link, Preventing Reoffending and Homelessness (2011) states that research has found that the incidence of reoffending rises to 79% where offenders are not in settled accommodation at the end of their sentence.
- 1.3 It is further recognised that to meet the accommodation and support needs of individuals who have a history of offending, failed accommodation and wider social exclusion, services need to be tailored to meet these holistic and often complex needs prior to release.
- 1.4 It is also recognised by the Regional Homelessness Group that there is a need to retain good practice that has been developed as a result of the Preventing Offender Accommodation Loss demonstrator project, which worked with Tees Valley housing authorities, HMP Low Newton and HMP Holme House. This project embedded local systems and liaison routes between prisons and housing providers to ensure a comprehensive homeless prevention / tenancy preservation / tenancy closure service for offenders.
- 1.4 The National Homelessness Charity, Shelter, was awarded a contract by the Ministry Of Justice in 2010, to provide housing and debt advice across public sector prisons in the North East. The service provided by Shelter is a generic service and in order to avoid duplication it is expected that the provider of the Through The Gate Service will work along side Shelter to complement their service and provide sustainable housing outcomes for individuals who are chronically socially excluded and who have a history of re-offending, insecure housing and homelessness.

## **2. Service Aims and Objectives**

2.1 The primary aims and objectives of the Through The Gate Service are to:

- (i) Provide a flexible person centred support service that identifies and assesses the accommodation and support needs of individuals who are chronically socially excluded and who have a history of re-offending, insecure housing and homelessness;
- (ii) Provide tailored support to sustain an individual's tenancy throughout the period of custody, or to complete a controlled closure of the tenancy through proactive liaison with landlords, benefit teams and families.
- (iii) Provide tailored support to individuals leading up to release to ensure accommodation is accessed and appropriate local support services are engaged.
- (iv) Provide added value which addresses the broader needs of the individual to prevent future homelessness, maximise life opportunities, reduce social isolation and exclusion and promote improved health and wellbeing.
- (v) Further reduce unplanned presentations to Local Authority Housing Options Services and increase tenancy sustainment and engagement.
- (vi) Reduce re-offending.

## **3. Service Description**

3.1 The Through The Gate Service is expected, but is not restricted, to provide the following:

- (i) Develop a protocol with Shelter which should cover such things as timescale for referrals, information sharing etc.
- (ii) Liaison with Landlords to prevent loss of tenancy or to close the tenancy as needed, acting as Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and negotiate between the landlord and tenant if there are any problems relating to the tenancy.
- (iii) Liaison with Housing Benefit Department or Department for Work and Pension, to ensure that Housing Benefit or Universal Credit Housing Element continues to be paid and that changes, which have an impact upon a benefit claim, are reported and that any problems are dealt with quickly.
- (iv) Liaison with family members, where appropriate to inform them of the work being done regarding the tenancy, and to liaise with others in respect of arranging storage of personal belongings where a tenancy has needed to be terminated.

- (v) Where appropriate, and with the agreement of the individual Service User, terminate the tenancy effectively, and inform all relevant agencies.
- (vi) Support Service Users to overcome barriers to accessing accommodation on release, including proactively working to minimise potential housing register exclusion issues.
- (vii) Support Service Users to obtain appropriate identification prior to release.
- (viii) Support Service Users to set up re-payment plans in respect of rent arrears.
- (ix) Provide Service Users with pre tenancy training, which at a minimum should include managing a tenancy and financial capability.
- (x) Develop volunteers from within the prisons to act as mentors to Service Users in preparing for independent living.
- (xi) Secure suitable and sustainable accommodation for Service Users to access on release, this can include a return to the family home, private or social rented sector accommodation, or supported accommodation.
- (xii) Negotiate with the family of Service Users if a return to the family home is sustainable and desired.
- (xiii) Provide support to the family of Service Users if a return to the family home is desirable but there is a risk of eviction.
- (xiv) Liaise with Local Authority Housing Options Teams, also known as Homeless and Housing Advice Services, to seek approval to refer Service Users and complete relevant applications and referrals.
- (xv) Develop protocols with the main landlords in the region, which should include such things as named contacts, information sharing, mechanisms for referral etc.
- (xvi) Where a Service User is to access accommodation in the private sector, ensure the accommodation meets with current requirements relating to housing law and that the tenancy agreement accords with legislation.
- (xvii) Make referrals and support applications to appropriate supported housing.
- (xviii) Arrange for viewing of accommodation prior to release if appropriate, making use of temporary release licensing arrangements.
- (xix) Pick Service Users up from the prison gates on release and transport to pre-arranged accommodation.
- (xx) Liaise with the relevant probation trust in respect of individuals who are released on licence.
- (xxi) Provide support to Service users to settle into accommodation including connection of utilities and sourcing furniture and assisting with grant applications.
- (i) Provide support to Service Users in relation to improving their compliance with statutory orders and related processes in relation to offending behaviour.

- (xxii) Ensure individual Service Users are registered with appropriate specialist support or advice services following release.
- (xxiii) Ensure individual Service Users apply for and are in receipt of appropriate benefits following release.
- (xxiv) Ensure individual Service Users are registered with training or employment agencies following release.
- (xxv) Provide a telephone advice service to individuals following release.
- (xxvi) Develop volunteers from within the community to act as mentors to provide ongoing support to Service Users following release.
- (xxvii) Raise awareness of the Service with potential Service Users, landlords and Housing Options Teams.

3.2 Support to settle into the accommodation and telephone advice should be provided to an individual Service User for up to 13 weeks. The Service Provider is expected to have in place effective assessment tools to define when it is appropriate to end support to an individual or to refer to an alternative service provider for the provision of ongoing support.

3.3 Administer and manage a Regional Personalisation Fund with the aim of preventing homelessness. The terms and conditions relating to the administration and management of the Regional Personalisation Fund is set out in the Regional Personalisation Fund Protocol at Part C to this agreement.

3.4 It is expected that the Service will support up to 300 Service Users each year with a minimum of 60 offenders being supported at any one time.

3.5 It is expected that the number of hours Service provided to individual Service Users will decline as key outcomes are achieved. However it is recognised that the hours of Service provided, may need to increase to support individual Service Users at times of crises.

#### **4. Access and Eligibility**

4.1 The Service Provider will accept referrals for individuals that have been assessed by Shelter to meet the following criteria:

- (i) Aged 18 years and upwards; and
- (ii) Who are in Durham, Holme House, Deerbolt, Kirklevington, Northumberland or Low Newton prison either on remand or serving a custodial sentence; and / or
- (iii) Who have been in custody previously and have a history of short sentences and insecure housing; and / or
- (iv) Who are identified as having high or complex support needs; and / or
- (v) With a history of rough sleeping and or insecure and or inappropriate accommodation placements; and

(vi) Who are due for release to the North East Region, this includes

- Durham
- Sunderland
- Newcastle
- North Tyneside
- South Tyneside
- Gateshead
- Northumberland
- Middlesbrough
- Stockton
- Darlington
- Redcar and Cleveland
- Hartlepool

- 4.2 The Service Provider is required to develop a protocol with Shelter, which should cover such things as timescale for referrals, information sharing etc.
- 4.3 The Service Provider is expected to have a referrals policy and procedure that is applied openly, fairly and consistently. The referral procedure should be in line with the Service Provider's equal opportunities policy and legislation.
- 4.4 The individuals referred to the service may have a broad range of support needs which may be multiple and complex. The Service Provider must consider each referral on a case-by-case basis with a full risk assessment and risk management package being made available to support Service Users with multiple complex needs. It will not be acceptable for the Service Provider to refuse referrals on the basis of complexity of needs or criminal convictions.
- 4.5 Where a risk assessment indicates that the person would be difficult to accommodate in a particular setting, the Service Provider will explore whether a risk management plan could be put into place to enable work to be carried out with the individual, or whether other resources could be brought into play in order to manage and minimise risks. The Service Provider is expected to put in place the required levels of support and intervention to manage and mitigate the risks present, and to promote the reform, resettlement and risk-management of individuals.
- 4.6 The Service Provider is expected to use its best endeavours to ensure the service is accessible to all minorities and hard to reach groups.
- 4.7 When refusing a referral, the Service Provider is expected to explain the reasons to the individual, Shelter, and other relevant agencies involved with the Service User, clarify whether another referral may be made at a later time or date, make a record including reason for the refusal and signpost to alternative services.

- 4.8 The Service Provider is expected to have in place a mechanism for dealing with appeals from individuals or other agencies involved with the Service user in respect of individuals who have been refused access to the Service.

## **5. Partnership Working**

- 5.1 The Service Provider will be required to work pro-actively with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies and landlords in order to achieve the Service objectives. The Service Provider will share information and good practice with these agencies to help prevent tenancy loss, close a tenancy, broker complementary support and enable access to accommodation in a timely manner.
- 5.2 The Service Provider is required to develop a protocol with Shelter, within the first 12 weeks of the commencement of this Agreement, which should cover such things as timescale for referrals, information sharing etc.
- 5.4 The Service Provider is required to develop protocols with Housing Options Teams across the region which should include such things as the contact details of Key Officers, information sharing, mechanisms for referral, requirements for housing outside of high impact localities, etc. The purpose of the protocols is to ensure the Service Provider is able to build positive relationships and to ensure that sustainable outcomes are planned and achieved.

## **6. Protection From Abuse For Vulnerable Adults**

- 6.1 The Commissioner expects the Service Provider and all its workers to be aware of National Vulnerable Adults policy. It is recommended that the Service Provider should have an internal policy, procedure and practice guidance on protection from abuse for vulnerable adults. The Commissioner expects all of the Service Providers workers to have basic adult protection awareness training in relation to protecting vulnerable adults from abuse.

## **7. Staffing**

- 7.1 The Service Provider will provide 148 Support Worker hours per week. Support Worker hours mean the people who have direct contact with Service Users and deliver the Service.
- 7.2 The Service Provider will ensure that there are sufficient trained, supervised and competent staff to meet the outcomes of individual Service Users and deliver the stated aims of the Service at all times.

- 7.3 Support Worker hours will be shared equally between Holme House and Durham prisons. Support Worker hours will also be provided as outreach to other prisons within the North East.
- 7.4 The Service will be available at days and times to suit individual Service Users. Hours of support will be provided flexibly at the discretion of the Service Provider according to the needs of the Service Users.
- 7.5 The Service Provider will provide regular supervision and appraisals to support and performance manage the Support Workers.
- 7.6 A contingency plan that sets out the Service Provider's arrangements to cover foreseeable emergencies must be submitted to the Commissioner annually for review.

## **8. Steering Group**

- 8.1 The Commissioner will establish a Steering Group to support the effective delivery of the Service.
- 8.2 Membership of the Group will include representatives from the Commissioning Authorities, the National Offender Management Service and the Service Provider.
- 8.3 Meetings will take place quarterly with the option of arranging additional meetings as needed.
- 8.4 The role of the Steering Group will be to
  - i) report and discuss performance and outcomes reports
  - ii) feedback development issues
  - iii) discuss any service issues

## **9. Performance and Outcomes Monitoring and Targets**

- 9.1 The Service Provider will submit to the Commissioner, quarterly performance reports for the preceding quarter no later than 7 days after the end of each quarter. The quarterly performance reports will include the information contained within Part D of this Agreement and progress made against the following outcomes.
- 9.2 It is expected that by the end of year one the following outcomes will be achieved:
  - (ii) 80% of Service Users referred to the Service who have an existing tenancy will be supported to prevent a loss of their tenancy, or for the tenancy to be closed appropriately.



- (iii) 80% of tenancies requiring closure will be actioned within 48 hours of the officer becoming aware of the need for this action.
- (iv) 80% of Service Users leaving prison and accessing accommodation will be assisted to avoid eviction for 13 weeks.
- (v) 80% of Service Users requiring support in relation to improving their compliance with statutory orders and related processes in relation to offending behaviour will have complied with statutory orders & processes while in receipt of the Service.
- (vi) 80% of Service Users will complete pre tenancy training prior to release or within 13 weeks of release.
- (vii) A minimum of 6 individuals within Durham, Holme House and Low Newton prisons will be developed to act as mentors to Service Users in preparing for independent living.
- (viii) 90% of Service Users referred to the Service who require support to secure accommodation on release will secure suitable and sustainable accommodation on release.
- (ix) 80% of Service Users who require support to set up a repayment plan in respect of rent arrears, will be supported to set up a repayment plan in respect of rent arrears.
- (x) 90% of Service Users who require a Support Worker to pick them up from the prison gates on release and transport them to pre arranged accommodation, will be picked up from the prison gates on release and transported to pre-arranged accommodation.
- (xi) 90% of Service Users who require support to register with appropriate specialist support or advice services following release will be registered with appropriate specialist support or advice services within 2 weeks of release.
- (xii) 80% of Service Users who require support to register with training or employment agencies following release will be registered with appropriate training or employment agencies within 2 weeks of release.
- (xiii) 90% of Service Users who require support to apply for appropriate benefits following release will have applied for appropriate benefits within 2 weeks of release.
- (xiv) 90% of Service Users who require ongoing housing related support will have been referred to appropriate support services, within 4 weeks of release.

- 9.3 The Service Provider is expected to devise its own processes to monitor progress against these targets; the process used will be made available to the Commissioner upon request.
- 9.4 These targets may be revised by the Commissioner with agreement of the Service Provider following the end of year one.
- 9.5 Further specific targets may be set by the Commissioner and agreed with the Service Provider once the Service is in operation.
- 9.6 The Service Provider will be expected to participate in an external service evaluation process, during the lifetime of the agreement, to assess its impact against the stated objectives.