

HOUSING NOTES

Pensioners' housing clinic

It seems that Anchor Housing Association wanted to start a *housing clinic* in Wigan to give housing advice to elderly people, but Grosvenor Housing Association indicated that there was no need, so this centrally funded service has gone to Preston instead.

Manchester Methodists Housing Association

The previous Director of this housing association died tragically just before Christmas last year. Since then the management committee has been meeting mainly in secret and not long ago four long-standing members of staff were surprised to find when they arrived for work one morning that their desks were cleared and their posts terminated. Is this Methodism in action?

GM Homes

As Manchester advertises its vacant post of Housing Director not a few people are wondering whatever's happened to Bob Young, the ebullient former post-holder who left fairly publicly recently with a £50,000 settlement. Housing Notes can reveal exclusively that the one-time Environmental Health Officer has set up his own consultancy, called "Greater Manchester Homes", which aims to drum up business advising tenants on their options for the management of their estates. Rumours that he's inquired about the rates for advertising in Housing Notes, Greater Manchester's only housing periodical, are without foundation.

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SLIP BEHIND THE SCREENS
MR SMITH AND I'LL HAVE
A LOOK AT YOUR ARREARS!



Housing Notes is produced every two months, produced jointly by Greater Manchester CHAR, Housing Projects Advisory Service, Shelter North West, Peterloo Housing Association and the Housing Rights Campaign.

Letters, articles, replies are all welcome and should be sent as soon as possible to the address below. The charge for advertisements is £5 per quarter page

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Please accept my/our subscription to Housing Notes.

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Subscriptions cost £5 a year (free if you are unemployed). Cheques should be made payable to "Peterloo HA (Housing Notes)".

Send this order form to Housing Notes, c/o PHA, 22 Birchfields Road, Rusholme, Manchester M13 0XR.

News from Salford

Salford Diocese reports 50 homeless people a day on average are coming to the cathedral asking for help: this is a significant increase and has prompted thoughts of opening a day centre. They are mostly older men, and there has been an increase in people with mental health problems. Contact: Salford Diocese 061 832 0573.

Walter Greenwood Court ... Salford's controversial plan to convert this inner city tower block into a multi-facility (aaagh!) for young single people in housing need gets odder by the Committee minute.

Salford City Reporter reports it will house a gym, whilst a persistent rumour says part of it will be used as accommodation for nurses, of which there is a terrible shortage (accommodation, that is). Social workers are concerned it'll be used to house young people leaving care, wherever they might currently be. Seems like Salford hope to 'solve' quite a few problems at one go in W.G. Court! Meanwhile, bemused tenants who've said they wish to stay have been moved up to the top two floors.

Return of the monster hostel

Here's a bright brash entrepreneurial enterprising idea - take an old warehouse in a run-down industrial part of Manchester's inner city, divide it up into lots, and lots, and lots of little boxes, call them bedrooms, add a few bathrooms, kitchens and wcs, and what have you got?! A monster hostel!

Yes, I know its not a new idea, but it would house a lot of students and others paying rent wouldn't it? And converting warehouses and such like for residential purposes is very trendy, isn't it?

Manchester Council received a planning application to do just this recently - its subsequently been withdrawn though a further application may yet appear.

Whoopie.

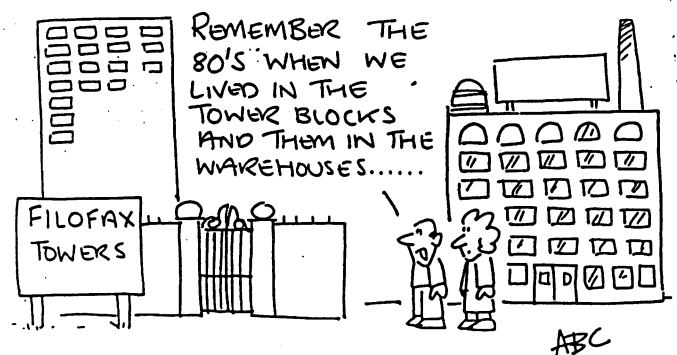
Homeliff..., homeliness..., homesnressive...

Do you have difficulty with saying and spelling those long words, like *onomatopoeia* and *asceticism*? You'll have some sympathy with Salford Council, then, who have the greatest difficulty saying or writing *homelessness*, it seems. First came their Housing Action Plan published a year or two ago which failed to mention it once and now Salford's released the housing plan part of its unitary development plan, and that doesn't mention it either ...

A HAC or a HIC for Salford?

Salford Council, slogan 'The New Era' (not "Error") is to set up a Housing Aid Centre, that's the good news ... The bad news, for private tenants, is that it'll be mainly for council tenants, and will be based in Eccles, on a budget of only £30,000. And council tenants shouldn't start celebrating too soon - the emphasis will be on Information not Aid. A HIC not a HAC.

Housing activists in Salford who've been fighting for a HAC for almost as long as Salford's had its Charter are underwhelmed. They argue that what's needed is an independent advice centre which can, where necessary, challenge the local authority as well as private landlords. They fear that Salford's HIC will do neither.



Market Wrents

Tenants of Manchester's Colshaw Farm overspill estate near Wilmslow will have smiled a wry smile at the report in a local paper this week of Wren Properties letting an ex-council house for three times the normal council rent. Wren cast covetous eyes at Colshaw Farm last year but were beaten off by tenant hostility. The Government is determined to force up council house rents to help the competitiveness of private landlords like Wren but even they might balk at 300% rises (don't put money on it - Ed.).

Meanwhile, Wren is spreading its wings by taking on a development with the Merseyside Development Corporation ...

Warrington's help for homeless people: the fax

Challenged to list what Warrington Council had done for the housing needs of single people in the last two years the audience at WAHG's (Warrington Action for the Homeless Group) AGM were stumped for a moment or two. Well, they support our new house for young homeless people, said one person, they're underwriting our annual budget by £1,000. And they give us an annual allocation of three tenancies for rehousing (the WAHG house sees, on average, six homeless young people every day). They've supported our schemes for single person housing, said the housing association reps, no money just moral support.

Silence.

Oh, and they let us use their Fax machine to send a submission to the Government on benefit changes.

Cor !

.. and the fiction

To be fair on Warrington, (yes, we must - Ed.), they do also support the local Salvation Army hostel for men though this isn't too much to shout about. Built over 20 years ago, its another 120-bed monster, a dead-end that offers homeless men little hope of rehousing. Mind you, the mayor two years ago, stung by criticism in a public meeting of this dinosaur hostel, retorted that he'd be happy to live there if his wife threw him out ...

Tenants' Choice? No thanks!

Wren might be at the head of the queue at the Housing Corporation for approved landlord status under the Tenants' Choice legislation (when and if they do submit an application) but they're also likely to be at the back. Response amongst private landlords and housing associations to this chance of a lifetime has apparently been rather less than a stampede.

How about a "Buy one estate, get one free" offer to perk up interest ?

Health update

In the last issue we reported the case of the Peterloo resident who died after being refused treatment by the G.P service.

At the same project a resident who was not registered with a G.P was suspected to have had a coronary. The staff phoned a very local G.P practice and were given the number of the Emergency Service. That service refused to send a doctor because the individual was not registered with them. The staff described the seriousness of his condition. The Emergency Service insisted there was nothing they could do and advised us to contact the Family Practitioner Committee.

The FPC advised us they could do nothing but informed us that a proviso in emergency doctors' contracts was that they had to attend someone who was not registered with a local doctor. Eventually the individual agreed to go directly to hospital where it was confirmed he had had a heart attack. Peterloo HA will be writing to the FPC with a complaint but it is quite clear that Emergency Services for G.Ps are not complying with their contracts.

Poll Tax (the so-called "Community Charge")

On the 1st of April 1990 most of us in England and Wales start paying Poll Tax. Whilst the legislation was approved by Parliament in 1988, the Regulations covering the operation of the Poll Tax, are still being produced and are expected to go on being produced right up until April 1990 and beyond. It does not require a Phd in logic to realise that the absence of final regulations makes the job of providing accurate (i.e. not misleading) and detailed (i.e. not vague) information pretty difficult. Undaunted by this challenge, the Department of the Environment have been at hand to combat the current epidemic of confusion on Poll Tax.

About six months ago the DoE issued a booklet called 'You and the Community Charge'. The Citizens Advice Bureaux thought it was misleading and refused to circulate it. This, and the fact that it was only published in small numbers, made it about as widely available as a grant from the Social Fund. Those of us fortunate enough to see this rare book found it not very detailed. However, the DoE had thought of this and referred readers to a set of pamphlets which explained various aspects of the Poll Tax in more detail. Unfortunately, the booklet did not inform readers that the pamphlets would not be available until May 1989.

Not wishing to make the same mistake twice, the DoE's next (and current) attempt at a public information exercise came in the form of the leaflet 'The Community Charge (The So-Called Poll Tax)'. We all marvelled at the fortitude of John Gummer MP as he joyously pushed this document through the letter boxes of the unsuspecting London public and then watched on as a High Court judge told him to desist from this practice immediately as he was misleading people.

Nevertheless, one of the benefits of living in a democracy is that the Court of Appeal has now decided that we can all judge for ourselves whether or not we are being misled.



All of this comes as no surprise to the Greater Manchester Poll Tax Forum which has spent the last year trying to get straight answers to straight questions out of the DoE with varied success. The Forum is a network of voluntary organisations and community groups concerned about the effect of the Poll Tax on their work. A year ago they wrote to Nicholas Ridley MP voicing their concerns and requesting some information. At this point Mr Ridley made two mistakes; he not only replied but he replied rather badly. This enabled the Forum to write back requesting more information and questioning some of the answers they had been given. Since then a healthy correspondence has been maintained between the Forum and the DoE although it is now with civil servants (the Forum has worn out two and is currently working on a third).

As a result, the Forum has collected quite a store of information which they have used to produce a Code of Good Practice - published to coincide with the fact that local authorities are beginning the process of compiling their Community Charge Registers. The Forum is urging all ten district councils in Greater Manchester to adopt the Code and asking other organisations - voluntary and statutory - to support it. The Code covers such areas as registration, advice, civil liberties, collection, appeals and rebates and is available from: GMPTF c/o GMCVS, St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester M12 6FZ. Price £1.00 (including postage).

Singularly Lacking

CHAR's recently published report on housing policies for single people in the Greater Manchester area is heavily critical of many authorities. It describes provision as "still woefully inadequate" (Trafford), "little ... of any sort" (Wigan), "virtually no general provision for single homeless people" (Oldham), "no direct-access accommodation for men or women" (Tameside), "very little is done for homeless people" (Bury), "still very poor" (Stockport), "little change over 10 years" (Salford), "very poor" (Bolton). The report does, however, note that progress has been made in some areas and by some of these authorities. It singles out Manchester for praise for having "... moved forward on a broad front of policy and provision improvement" and Salford for criticism for its failure to act on Salford House "still run by Social Services ... an entirely anomalous situation". It notes that Rochdale has made "some progress ... in trying to meet ... housing needs of disadvantaged groups".

The report, entitled "Singularly Lacking", comes ten years after CHAR launched its Hostel Replacement Campaign which called on the ten Greater Manchester local authorities to take action to close down the worst hostels and replace them with a range of accommodation. It goes on to highlight a number of areas where, it says, progress is urgently needed, particularly in the light of the continuing rise in homelessness:

- * direct access accommodation for women is still unavailable in most boroughs, in many there is nothing for men either. Rehousing opportunities, particularly for women, must be reviewed and improved

- * local authorities must join together to demand that the Department of Social Security fulfils its commitment to the closure of the Walkden Resettlement Unit and to the replacement package

- * young homelessness - local authorities are urged to review every aspect of their policies that affect in any way young people and to take whatever action feasible to ease the huge problems they face in getting adequate housing

- * local authorities must adopt systematic policies on, and a consistent overall approach to, houses-in-multiple-occupation, especially bed-and-breakfasts

- * local authorities must fund or provide a full and accessible housing advice service which has the freedom to promote its clients' rights and best interests.

Copies of the report are available free (donations welcome!) from: CHAR, c/o 85 Nicolas Rd, Manchester 21. Tel: 061 881 0341.

Skelmersdale-at-sea

The seagulls have seen most things at Blackpool, mostly in the water or washed up on the beach, but even their eyebrows (?? -Ed.) might have been raised by the launch, by Lord Skelmersdale, of the Department of Social Security's Resettlement Agency on 24th May at a seafront hotel. The Agency replaces the boring old Branch of the same name. It'll be (sort of) independentish but it won't have any more money to get on with the job of closing and replacing the Resettlement Units (such as Walkden) and it'll have even less clout with other Government Departments. The launch itself went well enough: the logo was everywhere, on bios and pens, on filofaxes, on Lord Skelmersdale's forehead ... the trade union demo was late for the latter's arrival and left before he did ... and the press, largely, stayed away ... much to the relief of the Agency management which is profoundly embarrassed ..

- .. because it hasn't got nearly enough money to fulfil allocation the promises it gave to local authorities and non-statutory agencies up and down the country who've worked for four years to draw up packages of provision for homeless people that'll enable the Units to close down

- .. because the aforementioned local authorities and non-statutory agencies may pull the plug themselves on their proposals anyway because of the Agency's failure to index-link grants

- .. because other new Government policies, such as on hostel and board & lodging charges are threatening what's left of the viability of these proposals

- .. because it failed to draw up legal contracts for well over £1M in capital grants already given out.

Crystal Balls

If you think that your voluntary organisation or housing association might be after Home Office cash in the next three to five years now's the time to tell the Greater Manchester Probation Service Local Forum for Accommodation for Offenders.

The Forum, which includes voluntary agencies, advises the Greater Manchester Probation Committee on its accommodation strategy and on bids for new funding. Any voluntary organisation seeking Home Office money needs the Committee's support.

The last quarterly meeting of the Forum agreed to ask voluntary organisations for information about their intentions, however vague, and any general ideas they might have to expand or vary their work in three to five years' time. This will help the Forum's strategic planning, avoid duplication, and enable the Probation Committee to tell organisations at the development stage whether they are likely to get its support. The Forum will circulate a summary of all the proposals.

The Forum next meets on Monday 17th July. Please send information to Sheelagh O'Brien, Housing Development Officer, 2nd Floor, Reliance House, Manchester M16 0PN (Tel: 061 873 7152) by Monday 3 July 1989.

Brighter Career

Staff of special needs housing projects could enjoy brighter career prospects thanks to a new training scheme to give people more chance to get qualifications. The Training Development Project (TDP) will ensure that housing workers benefit from the National Council for Vocational Qualifications' (NCVQ) overhaul of qualifying training, which has simplified the system and made it more accessible to all housing employees.

The TDP started in April 1989 to take advantage of the NCVQ, which the Government set up in 1986 to build a framework for qualifications for all occupations. The TDP will develop a nationally recognised qualification for special needs housing workers.

After 1991 the NCVQ will only give its "seal of approval" to qualifications based on employment requirements (competences), assessed in the workplace and independent of any specified time in education, training or work. "Lead Bodies" representing employers and employees are identifying employment requirements. Relevant organisations will then pilot these draft "competences".

The qualifications will not reflect voluntary organisations' work unless they help identify the competences. Special needs housing providers can do so through the Residential, Domiciliary and Day Care Project Group, either by bidding to take part in one of the pilot schemes with their local authority, or by responding to the consultation documents which it will put out in the autumn.

The contact for the Project Group is:

Terry Steele, North West Regional Training Unit, Appleton House, Appleton Road, off Wheelsbone Lane, Upton, Chester CH2 1JH. (tel 0244 312777).

What is the answer?

HPAS is cooperating with Single Homelessness in London (SHIL) and the Specialist Information Training Resource Agency for Single Person Housing (SITRA) in research into the revenue funding of special needs housing projects.

Councils, the DoE and the DSS are reviewing, changing or cutting nearly all of their revenue funding to projects. Trusts and corporate donors might make up some of these cuts and changes, but we cannot expect them to do so completely to prevent projects closing.

The London Borough Grants Scheme has given SHIL and SITRA money for six months' research, from March 1989, to back an effective case for the funding of special projects by central and local government. The involvement of HPAS, however, and other similar resource centres in the North East, Wales, the West Midlands and Kent will give the research findings national relevance despite its London focus.

TUG Just As Hard

A Housing Corporation discussion paper on the future funding of special needs housing, published in April 1989, details the pros and cons of two revenue options, a Special Needs Deficit Grant (SNDG) and a Special Needs Management Allowance (SNMA). Both would leave projects dependent on topping up grants to cover care costs.

The Corporation deferred a new financial regime until March 1990 pending the DSS's decision on Board and Lodging payments.

It needs to agree a new regime with the DoE, in consultation with the National Federation of Housing Associations and the voluntary groups, by the end of this calendar year.

It wants any new system to be client-oriented, with no bias towards shared housing to encourage the use of self-contained accommodation, and straightforward, to offer easy access to appropriate funding. It aims to keep the existing amount of special needs housing at rents people on low incomes and welfare benefits can afford.

SNDG would be like Hostel Deficit Grant, but it would include deficits on self-contained housing for people with special needs as well as on hostels. The needs of residents from a list of eligible groups, rather than the physical layout of the scheme, would decide revenue support.

The model for SNMA would be the Higher Management Allowances, based on excess management costs for "difficult to manage" housing. The Housing Corporation checks the reasonableness of housing associations' spending with tenants' and estates' "needs bands". SNMA would apply to special needs management costs in either shared or self-contained housing, using the groups eligible for SNDG as an initial guide. Once the Corporation had agreed associations' eligibility for SNMA they would be able to claim it without in-depth scrutiny of individual schemes.

Contact HPAS if you would like a copy of the discussion paper, at 22 Birchfields Road, Rusholme, Manchester M13 0XR.

I'M SORRY BUT
ACCORDING TO
THIS LEAFLET
YOU CAN'T
EVICT ME
LIKE THIS!



Going Steady

Tameside Community Involvement Council (TCIC) have found a good partner in Tameside MBC when it comes to finding permanent homes for their residents. Tameside rehouses approximately 20 people a year from TCIC's six projects as necessary, although it has not set a limit on numbers.

TCIC's six projects house up to 45 people. Stamford Villa and Denton House provide 15 places for men over 17 years old, Heathfield has seven places for men aged 17 to 25 and Carolan eight places for men over 55. Another project houses up to seven women and their babies and TCIC plan a further one for women. Finally, at Sunnybank people can stay up to 12 months with minimum support in one of six two-bedroomed, self-contained houses before moving to complete independence.

Rehousing is crucial with such a range of accommodation. TCIC staff nominate residents to Tameside after a minimum of three months to assess their needs fully and to make sure that they can look after themselves. A case conference with Council officers avoids inappropriate referrals and offers. Tameside then applies its general lettings rules and often makes an offer within three months on average.

Tameside gives TCIC a lot of support but does not use that as an excuse to wash its hands of TCIC's residents. This sense of shared responsibility enables the two organisations to achieve far more than either could alone.

Not so special anymore

Patrick Cornwell, of GMCHAR, argues against the widespread use of the term "special needs":

Noticed how the term "Special Needs" is everywhere these days ? Tagged onto every self-respecting forum, working party committee, report, video, tee shirt, key fob ... even sprinkled liberally through the pages of Housing Notes ... its ubiquitous and not a little mystifying.

What *does* it mean ? Few members of the public could tell you, and not everyone involved in housing's too sure either, if the number of times it is used loosely as a synonym for "homelessness" is anything to go by.

Homelessness is not a *special* need: it is the most *extreme* form of housing need. The concept of "special needs", like "priority status", can all too easily be a way of dividing people who are homeless into 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor'. There's nothing remarkable about this in a way, its consistent with the Government's general approach, but *we* should be more aware of its divisiveness. For example, just what is the remit of a "Special Needs Housing Forum" ?

To cover the needs of homeless people with special needs ? If so, why exclude other homeless people from its remit ?

Or to cover the needs of all homeless people ? If so, why not call it a homelessness forum, why mystify it ?

If special needs housing provision caters for all homeless people then what's so special ? If it doesn't, why not ?

LANCE

At a Lance hostel in north Manchester a set of 'master' keys has gone missing.

Lance's response has been to give all the residents seven days notice to quit, as it will take them 14 days to replace all the locks.

Once the new locks are in place, the residents can come back!

Where has the money gone?

A massive debate is going on at the present time about where Housing Corporation money for Housing Associations should be channeled. The controversy began with a report written by Glen Bramley of the School for Advanced Urban Studies in Bristol University for the Association of District Councils. In the report Bramley claims that three areas, including the North West, receive "exceptionally favourable treatment".

He argues for greater resources for London and the South East especially to tackle homelessness and increase opportunity for home ownership. This simplistic analysis quite rightly led to a storm of protest and some Northern Housing Associations commissioned a report from York University debunking the research methods from Bristol. The York research for an active regional policy, something Bramley dismisses as unrealistic in the present political climate.

However, it seems that the damage has been done. The DoE, though officially denying it, are said to be very interested in the in the report (i.e. unconfirmed government sources) and the Housing Corporation has welcomed Bramley.

There is no doubt that however spurious the research the Government will welcome any evidence that allows them to switch resources from the North to appease Tory Councils in the South East.

What the debate on the whole has failed to encompass however is that the cake is so small at the present time that talking about the redistribution rather than the size of resources is an insult to the homeless and the badly housed. Also, there is no mention of the increase in homelessness caused by migration. Every documentary on the Single Homeless of London focuses on people from the North of England, Scotland and Ireland. To tackle homelessness in these communities would be far more worthwhile than increasing the likelihood of people having to move to try and grab a little of the resources this government is prepared to make available. There will undoubtedly be a battle to ensure there is any public investment through Housing Associations to the North of England. It will be interesting to see which Associations put up a fight for our region and which simply turn away and sulk.

John Rossington

Peterloo HA