

The Bill Sargent Trust

Research for Action

Registered Charity No: 1042611

The Role of **Housing Associations** in Supporting their **Residents** to find **Employment** and **Training**

A Bill Sargent Trust Action Research Project

Summary and **Key Points** for **Social Landlords**
and those involved in providing
Employment, Training and **Guidance Services**





BACKGROUND

The Bill Sargent Trust is a social research charity based in Portsmouth and SE Hampshire and supported by Portsmouth Housing Association. In October 2008 the Trust employed Andrew Preskey, an experienced Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) practitioner/manager to obtain unemployed social housing residents experiences and views on employment and training. The research was carried out in 2009.

The research project was initiated in response to the debate following the findings of the Hills Report which highlighted the concentration of “workless” households in social housing estates. Portsmouth HA (whose residents participated in the research) has a level of “worklessness” equivalent to or slightly greater than the national average for social housing (40%).

The national picture is one of an increasing concentration of workless households in social housing as a result of the sale of social housing and (until recently) increased access to owner occupation for lower income families; a benefits system that impacts on unemployment and a variety of identified barriers to work, including lack of qualifications, disability, caring responsibilities and addictive behaviours.

The aim of this BST research project was to test the experiences of local residents and to investigate the barriers they faced, what services they felt worked for them and the benefit of first step IAG provided through the social housing landlord.

During the lifetime of the research project the UK economic outlook changed from the highest ever levels of economic activity into deep recession and increased unemployment. While this does not change the underlying key messages it makes it even more difficult for many social housing residents to gain employment in a more competitive labour market.



REPORT PURPOSE

- ▶ To identify the motivation to find employment and the “work readiness” for different groups of economically inactive housing association residents.
- ▶ To explore the perceived adequacy of support services and benefits supporting workless housing association residents into employment.
- ▶ To support, and evaluate the effectiveness of a pilot, “first step” information, advice and guidance service provided by a housing association.



KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ Residents felt the way they were treated by employment guidance and support services was as important as the help they received. They wanted to be listened to, to have a service tailored to their needs, to be treated as a person not a number and not to be patronised.
- ▶ Nearly half of those who said they felt ready to return to work were not applying for jobs. For some this reflected childcare responsibilities, but for others it reflected a lack of belief that they could find work.
- ▶ A third of residents felt they would not be better off in work but a follow up study found that in over three quarters of the cases reviewed they would have been better off in work. There are however significant problems in transitions between unemployment and work.

- ▶ Pay was of high importance to more than half, but job satisfaction, hours of work and friendliness of the work setting were also important. Pay was of higher importance to women than men (possibly reflecting lone parents' priorities).
- ▶ Four out of five found the initial Information, Advice and Guidance pilot useful and half said it was "different" through being more personal. There was no anxiety about it being an "in house" service provided by the landlord.
- ▶ Job Centre Plus had a mean satisfaction score of 4.5 out of 10, residents aged 25-39 gave it the highest score (5.8), young people under 25 gave it particularly low scores (2.6), followed by those aged 50+ (4.1) and women (4.2).
- ▶ Recruitment to the focus groups & the pilot IAG project was difficult despite heavy advertising and incentives – indicating lower confidence, trust or motivation.



RESIDENTS' BACKGROUNDS

52 "workless" social housing residents attended focus groups & one to one interviews. Their characteristics were:

- ▶ A self selected group who attended locally advertised focus group discussions.
- ▶ A fifth unemployed in the last year (2008-9), two thirds had become unemployed in the last 3 years and a quarter had been out of work for more than 10 yrs (largely those aged 50+).
- ▶ Over a quarter were disabled or had a long term limiting illness.
- ▶ Over a half had volunteering experience and this was valued.
- ▶ Older residents were largely divided between those with no qualifications and those with higher qualifications (level 5+) while younger residents were poorly qualified (four fifths had no qualifications or qualifications at or below NVQ 2).

16 social housing residents who were provided with initial Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) were interviewed by phone on their experience.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Eight residents were trained as community researchers as part of the research programme.

The researcher was supported by this group to run morning and afternoon focus groups for Portsmouth HA residents at six venues across Gosport, Havant and Portsmouth. The sessions included group discussions about the perfect service to help gain employment and one to one interviews on individual's background and experiences.

The research also included a number of follow up interviews with a benefits advisor to check whether residents views about being better off in work were objectively correct; follow ups with services identified by residents as being particularly helpful; follow up interviews with 16 residents who had taken part in a pilot IAG initial guidance project provided by Portsmouth HA and meetings with staff from two other IAG projects working with First Wessex residents in Eastleigh and Aldershot.



CORE MESSAGES

- ▶ The idea that social housing residents, particularly those living in areas of deprivation have a negative attitude to employment is too simplistic.
- ▶ The need to build trust and confidence with individuals includes listening and providing a personal service.
- ▶ The need to link Information, Advice and Guidance with benefits advice and assist in the transition periods.
- ▶ A “first step” IAG service provided by or in close association with a social housing landlord can add value to other ways of working with “workless” residents.
- ▶ Employment and Training services and social landlords need to work together more closely to support unemployed residents find ways back into work.



ABOUT THE BILL SARGENT TRUST

The Bill Sargent Trust carries out research on housing and related issues. It seeks to influence policy with the outcomes of the research.

The Trust was established to commemorate one of the founders of Portsmouth Housing Association, the late Reverend Bill Sargent. Currently the Trust is sponsoring research to look at issues of community benefit in the disposal of surplus MOD land.

The Trust operates with close support from Portsmouth Housing Association, now itself a member of The First Wessex Housing Group.

The Trustees are Mark Mitchell, Ben Stoneham and Nigel Baldwin. The Trustees are currently seeking to appoint additional Trustees. The Trust welcomes proposals for local research projects on housing, homelessness, poverty and related issues. The Trust is also grateful for financial contributions to its funds.

For a copy of the full report, further copies of this summary or more information about the Bill Sargent Trust visit: www.firstwessex.org and follow the links to Portsmouth Housing and then the Bill Sargent Trust.

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