

**MAKING YOUR MARK ON THE FUTURE  
DELIVERY OF HOMELESSNESS POLICY**

**Report of six regional seminars held  
across Scotland**

**January 2003**

***THE HOMELESSNESS MONITORING GROUP***

## MAKING YOUR MARK ON THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF HOMELESSNESS POLICY

This report provides reflections on six regional seminars which were organised across Scotland on behalf of the Homelessness Monitoring Group (HMG) between late October and early December 2002.

The intention of the seminars was to raise awareness of the work of the Homelessness Task Force (HTF) and the ongoing work of the HMG and to give a platform for practitioners to give feedback to the HMG. The seminars were marketed to over 2000 frontline housing, homelessness and support workers across Scotland who will be directly responsible for implementing the HTF recommendations. It should be noted that these events were not designed to be a primary consultation event for local politicians or homeless people themselves.

Three hundred and ninety people registered an interest in attending the events. To ensure small discussion groups and a representative mix of sectors and geographical areas, Communities Scotland, the Scottish Executive and Shelter Scotland together selected 298 delegates to attend. The final total number attending was 233<sup>1</sup>.

The report is based on three sources of information: (1) seminar evaluation forms, (2) notes from 46 seminar discussion groups, and (3) feedback forms from 175 delegates about the work of the HTF/HMG. This information provides details of delegates' backgrounds and their awareness of and reaction to the HTF report. It also gives considerable insight into the level of support for the work of the HTF and HMG amongst homelessness and related organisations.

In the report we attempt to report views as they were presented to us by the participants. Where percentages are shown in the body of the report these capture responses to direct questions posed in the feedback form; however these figures do not take into account the cumulative effect of 57 hours' discussion on any given topic. Consequently, these percentages should not necessarily be taken as evidence of delegates weighting any one theme over another, as participants contributed opinion through both group discussion and specific questionnaire answers. It should also be noted that views expressed may or may not converge with those of Shelter Scotland whose role was simply to host the events.

In this short report it is impossible to do justice to the sheer range and volume of views presented. There will undoubtedly be strongly held views and good ideas that are not included here. Also, when attempting to summarise 233 opinions some views may appear to be contradictory. However, the seminars need to be seen as much about the **process** into which they fit as about the immediate **outputs**. The fact that not every view can be reflected here does not mean that they will not be raised and developed locally. In the report we also do not draw out the differences between different regions. Although different seminars certainly raised different points (although the amount of common ground was also striking), it is difficult to determine to what extent that is an issue relating to those regions, rather than being a simple accident of, for example, the different mix of people who participated.

These attendees have laid out what they believe to be the main issues they will face in implementing the HTF action plan, and importantly, they suggest where they would spend resources if they had the money. Additionally, delegates make suggestions as to where the main challenges and opportunities lie and how their organisations can help meet them. Practical suggestions for training and training needs, on guidance and on informing homeless people also arise from this feedback.

Finally, this report begins a process by which frontline organisations have been given the opportunity to provide feedback to the HMG and the Scottish Executive. 93% of delegates wanted further opportunities to provide feedback over the coming years.

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<sup>1</sup> In two of the seminars, in particular, there was a relatively high number of people who registered but did not turn up. This was probably because the events were free but it was frustrating because in all of the seminars demand exceeded available places and we had to make quite difficult choices about who could be selected to attend.

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- The six seminars organised by Shelter for the HMG proved highly popular, with almost 400 people registering an interest in attending and 233 delegates finally participating in the events following a selection process aimed at ensuring a diverse mix of delegates. All but two of Scotland's local authorities were represented and there was a good spread of people from other sectors as well. Two groups – homeless people and local authority councillors – were not specifically targeted for these events and need to be considered separately.
- Almost all attendees felt that the seminars had met the two aims: of informing them about the work of the HMG and allowing them a chance to give feedback.
- Most delegates felt informed about the HTF report and there was a high level of sympathy to it and willingness to engage with the action plan that the HMG is now overseeing. However, it could be that more sceptical staff simply did not come to events.
- People were pleased at the way the HTF report had given higher priority to homelessness nationally and endorsed its emphasis on culture change. However, three-quarters of delegates also expressed concerns about the commitment of resources.
- There are five key areas which delegates identify as challenges locally in delivering on the HTF action plan. These are:
  - Housing supply and quality: concern that the more limited changes introduced by the 2001 Act had already created pressure that had not been anticipated. It was suggested that better modelling of the likely housing supply impacts was needed.
  - Support: lack of consensus about the scale and nature of support services needed and concern about funding new services once Transitional Housing Benefit passes into Supporting People.
  - Developing ways of working: recognition that achieving changes in culture takes time. Specific concerns were raised about changing public attitudes to homelessness and making sure that local authority councillors were fully engaged with the process of change.
  - Staff and training: staff recruitment is already a problem and will grow with additional demands. There are also significant training needs on a range of areas for which additional capacity is needed. Staff see the value of a national homelessness website, although not all like to receive information electronically. An annual HMG event is also suggested.
  - National Homelessness Policy: a clearer message is needed on the role of regulation in light of the many HTF recommendations. Delegates want to see the HMG act as a focus for the case for additional resources by helping to piece together the scale of unmet needs for housing and support.
- The HMG has a unique starting point of goodwill among practitioners. To sustain that it needs to continue to engage with the practitioner community; to show that it can

respond to some of the concerns that are raised; and to be able to act as a focus for the additional resources which are needed to deliver on the HTF report.

## **II TERMS**

1. The Homelessness Task Force (HTF) was set up on 17 June 1999: "To review the causes and nature of homelessness in Scotland; to examine current practice in dealing with cases of homelessness; and to make recommendations on how homelessness in Scotland can best be prevented and, where it does occur, tackled effectively." The HTF held meetings until January 2002. It published two national reports:

- Helping Homeless People: Legislative Proposals on Homelessness. Homelessness Task Force Initial Report (April 2000)
- Homelessness: An Action Plan For Prevention And Effective Response. A Report From The Homelessness Task Force To Scottish Ministers. Homelessness Task Force Final Report (February 2002)

2. The Homelessness Monitoring Group (HMG) was set up in May 2002 to "support and monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the Homelessness Task Force". Its work is ongoing and focuses on the implementation of the HTF's second report.

The HTF's work has now finished and the HMG is just beginning.

## **III MAIN SEMINAR REPORT**

The seminars were held in five areas: Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Ayr, Dundee and two in Glasgow. Each of the seminars was marketed to a specific geographical area. They followed a common format. In each case, a member of the HMG<sup>2</sup> introduced the HTF report and the work of the HMG. The rest of the day was given over to two discussion groups. The morning groups were, where possible, facilitated by homelessness strategy co-ordinators or other leading homelessness practitioners locally. They focused on challenges thrown up by the HTF report. The afternoon groups were led by Shelter members of staff and focused on ways forward. These workshops concluded with delegates filling out a detailed feedback form, which leads to much of the material in this report. The chair for the day summed up key points.

This section of the report is divided into four parts. The first considers the backgrounds of delegates and asks whether they considered the seminars to be a success. The second considers delegates' reaction to and awareness of the work of the HTF and its most recent report. It considers what delegates see as its strengths, weakness and areas that have been missed. The main body of this section considers in detail the main issues that arose during the seminars. Part Three considers the role that delegates feel that their own organisations will be able to play in implementing the report, and finally, Part Four considers which of the many areas raised by delegates as needing funding should be regarded as priorities.

### **PART 1 BACKGROUND OF DELEGATES AND THEIR RATING OF THE SEMINARS**

As the table below shows, the large majority of those attending the seminars worked for a local authority (housing, homelessness and social work etc) or for the voluntary sector.

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Percentage attending</b>
Local authority	44%

<sup>2</sup> The contribution of the following HMG members to the seminars is gratefully acknowledged: Liz Nicholson, David Alexander, Robert Aldridge, Rita Miller, Mark Turley and Suzanne Fitzpatrick. In addition, chairing was carried out by a senior Executive official, representatives of the Big Issue and the Chartered Institute of Housing as well as Shelter staff.

Voluntary sector	37%
RSLs	10%
NHS / Care Trusts etc	5%
Government	3%
Private sector	1%

Thirty of Scotland's thirty-two local authorities were represented at the seminars. Repeated contact was made with the missing two but they were unable to find someone to attend.

The primary job responsibilities of delegates were:

Housing (35%) which includes housing and homelessness officers and frontline homelessness services (e.g. outreach teams, project workers, homelessness officers and hostel workers).

Support (24%), which included tenancy support and practical help for homeless people (including health and homelessness work).

Policy and strategy (20%).

Advice and information (13%).

8% did other jobs (e.g. training, estate management/regeneration, fundraising, working with volunteers and tenant participation).

The main activities of organisations/departments/sections were similar to the main activities of delegates. The main areas of work were:

Housing (39%)

Advice, information and advocacy (22%)

Support (17%)

Policy and strategy (15%)

Other (8%).

Evaluation of the HMG seminars suggest that these delegates felt that the seminars were a success and achieved the objectives that were set out. During the last discussion group of each seminar, delegates were asked to complete a seminar evaluation form to allow Shelter to monitor the effectiveness of its administration, the quality of its service and the success of the events in meeting our stated aims (these were quite separate from the more detailed feedback forms).

Across the six seminars, 149 questionnaires were completed and returned.

To evaluate whether Shelter had met its stated aims in running the regional seminars, we asked delegates to decide whether the day had informed them about the recommendations and had given them a chance to give meaningful feedback on the proposed changes. 89% of delegates felt that their seminar had met both aims. 5% felt better informed, but did not feel they had been given a chance to give meaningful feedback. 6% would have like more information, but felt they had been given the opportunity to comment. No delegates who responded felt that neither aim had been met.

78% of delegates completing the form thought that the clarity of Shelter's advance seminar materials was good or excellent. 73% rated Shelter's contact by email or telephone in advance of the conference as good or excellent. 51% of delegates rated the helpfulness of Shelter staff on the day of the conference as good and 44% as excellent.

The questionnaire gave delegates a chance to give any other comment about the content and format of the seminars. Comments included: “Very useful and informative day”; “More time would have helped. This is one subject that gets everyone talking”; “The seminar was informative as well as interactive in that there was plenty of chance for discussion”; “Excellent workshops”; “Good mix of disciplines and experience”; “There was a good constructive debate in the discussion groups”; “Very productive input from other delegates”; “all well and good but [these events should be] part of a process”.

It does seem that the seminars helped to meet a gap in practitioners’ needs but that momentum needs to be sustained.

## **PART 2 AWARENESS OF AND REACTION TO THE WORK OF THE HOMELESSNESS TASK FORCE**

This section sets out delegates’ awareness of and reactions to the work of the HTF. It outlines the areas they see as strengths, as weaknesses and as being missing from the report entirely.

Awareness of the work of the HTF is high. 69% of delegates felt that, prior to attending the HMG seminar, they were very well or quite well informed, and 25% said they felt a bit informed. Just 6% said they didn’t feel informed at all.

Delegates are also well informed about the contents of the second HTF report. Almost 40% had read it in some depth and felt very well informed, and a further 53% felt quite well or a bit informed. Fewer than 7% felt badly informed or not informed at all. Awareness is likely to be high for two reasons:

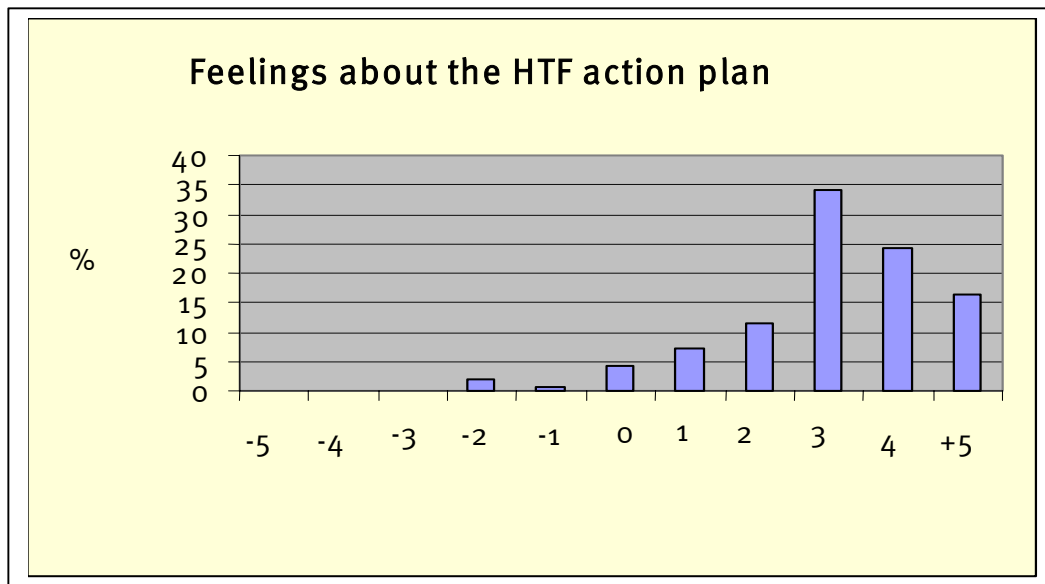
1. 140 of the delegates have been involved in the development of a homelessness strategy. The majority (64) were from local authorities (on whom the duty to produce a strategy rests), but there are also many organisations who have become involved in planning future homeless policy in their areas in some way (e.g. 43 were involved as a consultation partner, 12 responded to a consultation, 10 were involved in focus groups/seminars and 7 were involved through a network).
2. 134 delegates (or their organisation) were members of a policy network. The most common individual networks were homelessness strategy groups (42). 79 were local homelessness networks, 40 national networks, 15 were focused on support, 9 on housing and planning and 25 on other issues such as health and homelessness.

Those who were not involved in the development of a homelessness strategy or a member of a policy group or forum were those with the least awareness of the work of the HTF.

One caveat to this generally high level of engagement with homelessness policy change is that those most likely to come to such events may be most likely to be well-informed. We cannot conclude from this exercise alone that the practitioner community as a whole is well-informed.

### **2.1 Reaction to the HTF report**

The graph below shows that the large majority of delegates feel positively about the action plan outlined by the HTF. We asked attendees to say how they felt about the action plan, on a scale. Minus 5 would be hostile or unsympathetic while plus 5 would be warm and receptive.



On this scale the majority of delegates nominated 3 and 4 (approx. 55%), with a further approx. 23% nominating 5. This is a very positive set of responses and is generally reflective of the very positive and forward-looking spirit in which the seminars were held. However, the same caveat as made above might be repeated; those who are hostile might simply not come.

157 of the delegates provided reasons why they were sympathetic or not to the HTF action plan. The comments of those who supported the plan but suggested significant problems with it were included in the unsympathetic category.

### **Positive feelings about the HTF plan**

The main reason why people are enthusiastic and or sympathetic to the HTF action plan is that it will keep the prevention and alleviation of homelessness at the top of the national agenda (50%). Other reasons included: the cultural changes, such as joint working, delegates hope it will introduce: improving services and service delivery for homeless people (29%), the level of consensus (including involving homeless people) behind the report (17%) and its focus on supporting all those who work with homeless people or in related areas.

### **Concerns about the HTF plan**

The main reason why people felt hostile, unsympathetic or sceptical were general concerns about implementation. 76% of delegates said that they didn't believe there would be enough housing, time, money, support and/or staff available. The remaining 24% was split between a number of issues, most commonly: (1) concerns about policies which conflict with the work of the HTF, e.g. problems with housing benefit, local authority policies (on evictions, rent arrears and anti-social behaviour), the impact of drugs legislation etc; and (2) concerns that housing and related staff will be hostile to it, e.g. local authorities expressed concerns about attitudes of RSLs and elected members<sup>3</sup>.

## **2.2 The main strengths of the HTF report**

The main strength of the HTF report is its comprehensiveness (it is regarded as well researched and inclusive), which has led to a general recognition of the scale of the homelessness problem amongst policy makers and what is needed to tackle it (36%).

<sup>3</sup> These points are covered further below. The point here is not to verify whether RSLs are, indeed, less inclined to engage with the HTF action plan. Rather it is to report that some local authority officers raised this as a concern and in, perception terms, at least, that needs to be addressed.

Other identified strengths include: (1) 22% mentioned the legislation that has resulted from its work (Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness Etc. (Scotland) Bill 2002) - and within the legislation - homelessness strategies and withdrawal of priority need, and (2) 24% mentioned the focus on partnership working and/or the need for culture change.

The remaining 17% of responses pointed to: the useful focus on support needs, the long term planning involved, the recognition of the value of needs assessments, the need for quality, independent advice and advocacy for homeless people, and the need for benefits changes.

### **2.3 Main weaknesses of the HTF report**

47% of delegates identified the main weakness of the HTF report as being its vagueness on all issues around resources, particularly in relation to the supply of appropriate housing and well qualified support staff. As a result a small number of attendees felt that the report expresses unachievable aspirations. Some of their concerns are that it is:

- Insufficiently focused on delivering and paying for all forms of support
- Too vague on housing supply in all areas (particularly rural areas)
- Not adequately linked to identified timescales, so partners can't plan
- Unclear whether money will be available to recruit and pay more 'permanent' staff
- Dependent on the quality of regulation, but quality regulation costs money
- Not going to work unless all homeless people and homelessness and related practitioners are aware of its work, but such awareness-raising costs money
- Dependent on changing the culture of homelessness services, but partnership working, amongst other things, costs money

On the issue of timescales (point three above), it is striking how few people had any sense of the different pace at which the 59 recommendations were taking place. Sometimes, one had the impression that practitioners thought they were expected to move ahead with all changes simultaneously. The HMG work programme makes clear that this is not the case, so wider dissemination of that work programme, perhaps in a summary form, would be a useful contribution. It would assist local planning (as identified) and help to ease some feelings of panic about being overwhelmed with too many priorities at once.

39% talked about the need for further detail or guidance on certain areas of the work of the HTF (see the section on information below).

### **2.4 The most important recommendations**

The most important of the recommendations of the HTF report as they related to each delegate's work were identified as:

- The new and proposed legislative changes (the Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Homelessness Etc. (Scotland) Bill 2002) (45%)<sup>4</sup>.
- Recommendations on culture change and partnership working (15%).
- Recommendations around support in its widest sense (15%)

### **2.5 What is missing from the HTF report?**

44% of delegates suggested that the report didn't provide sufficient detail on issues around resources. How much money will be available for implementing the report? How will support and support staff be funded? How much housing is needed and where it will

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<sup>4</sup> Although the seminars were very carefully designed to cover all of the HTF recommendations, not just those related to homelessness law, the fact that the Homelessness etc (Scotland) Bill was going through the first stage of the parliamentary process at the same time, probably had an impact on delegates' views.

come from (particularly rural areas)? And how much time would be available for implementing each recommendation? Other areas highlighted included:

- 18% suggested the report doesn't deal with contradictory policies at a national level (e.g. some aspects of the housing benefit system).
- 12% said that there is not enough attention on changing cultures and attitudes, through awareness raising amongst homelessness people, councillors, the public and all those working with homeless people.
- 10% of delegates felt that there was insufficient weight attached to regulation and performance monitoring in the report.
- 4% felt that the report did not provide sufficient detail on how housing providers should deal with the most difficult homeless people.
- 3% felt that the report should have considered the ways in which the land use planning system can contribute to affordable housing through planning gain.

Other suggestions included: the private rented and owner occupied sectors; proofing Scottish Executive documents for homelessness issues, and that a homelessness co-ordinator, perhaps based in the Scottish Executive, might be useful (this last point is considered further below).

## **2.6 The main challenges**

Here we consider, in detail, the main issues that were of concern to delegates. Each of the following summaries represents, at times, a number of hours of discussion and hundreds of sheets of written comments and may not fully capture all of the issues discussed.

### **1. Housing supply and housing quality**

1. Most areas, it is argued, do not have enough houses to respond to new demands and, even if they do, they are often in areas where homeless people refuse offers of housing or take them and then subsequently become homeless again. Delegates were wary of the perception that homeless people are queue jumpers and the only way to counter that is an increase in the supply of decent affordable housing for all. It was suggested that the pace of the HTF report's implementation must be in line with increases in the supply of housing. Concerns were expressed that this had not been the case so far. The example cited was the high amount of additional temporary housing still required to meet the new duties to provide temporary accommodation to homeless people that came in on 30th of September 2002.

2. Delegates suggested that theoretical modelling based around costs of various "how many extra houses" options needs to be carried out. Such an exercise could look more creatively at housing waiting lists and homeless applicants to identify how we can overcome country wide social housing shortages. It was felt that this kind of modelling tool could be commissioned by the HMG. It was also felt that Local Housing Strategies would do some of this modelling and that it was legitimate of such documents to identify gaps in supply as much as to set out development programmes. RSLs need to be fully involved in these strategies.

3. It was recognised that, even with additional money for new and better housing, housing providers need to come up with creative ways of adding to housing supply: e.g. local authorities could lease/purchase housing, fit existing housing closer to people's needs, and/or reduce void periods with proactive lettings policies and portable discounts.

4. A particular set of supply issues relates to the private rented sector. Better liaison between local authorities and the private rented sector is needed. This could be done by (a) a liaison officer in all authorities; or (b) as part of the further development of rent deposit schemes. More support should be provided to private landlords to encourage them to rent at reasonable cost, take people on housing benefit and rent good quality housing. Better regulation of the private rented sector is needed, but it should be coupled with funding and incentives to encourage landlords to take part.

5. Planning and housing is considered a priority. National Planning Policy Guideline 3 should be revised to emphasise that the planning system should play its part in contributing to the provision of affordable housing; and local opposition to new build housing developments for homeless people could be reduced if planners were more proactive in working with local communities on each planning application.

6. Finally, it is recognised that housing supply and quality is as much about area as about individual houses. The problems of some areas need tackling, as they are often the only areas where housing is available. Homeless people want good housing in decent areas. When allocated a house people may not want to take it because of what is out there (e.g. it may put them back in touch with addiction). What makes an area somewhere someone wants to live is not just housing quality, but also environment, community (schools, neighbours), local resources (bus stops, shops), etc. Money needs to be spent in areas to tackle anti-social behaviour, drug problems, improving community safety and providing employment opportunities. Positive images of traditionally deprived housing estates need to be created which go hand in hand with this investment and encourage residents – old and new – to commit to the area.

## 2. Support

1. Housing supply is crucial but tackling homelessness is not just about housing any more; it is also about providing support. All homeless people should be offered support. However, there is no common consensus on what we mean by support, what the scale of unmet need is and what should be priorities for funding. It is not clear that the policy commitment to supporting homeless people is matched by capacity to deliver. There were also concerns that the support available would only cover certain limited activities when a range of support, from a range of providers, is needed. Some areas, such as preparing for employability, were seen to be important but likely to be marginalized.

2. Local authorities should take the lead on piecing together (or mapping) local support provision. Such a map will show: (1) gaps in services which need to be filled to provide a seamless service, and (2) areas where all support providers in an area need to work together. This should be part of homelessness strategies because support providers' respective roles must be clarified by tying various strategies together – domestic abuse strategies, drug and alcohol strategies, health and homelessness strategies etc.

3. Supporting People is welcome but problematic in practice. Delegates said that the bidding race for Transitional Housing Benefit (THB) money has been unsatisfactory. They argued that Supporting People won't provide all the funding needed to implement the HTF report. This is because the process of implementing the HTF report (and therefore identifying new support needs) will fall after the closure of the THB window. In that light practitioners were looking for reassurances about funding of pipeline projects and some scope to secure additional funding if new support needs are identified.

4. There is a particular set of challenges around support for people who are regarded as difficult or unwilling to engage with services. Clients include serious drug and alcohol users, some people with mental health needs, sex offenders and those who are anti-social. Housing providers need guidance and suggested solutions on how to handle such cases. It was suggested that a panel of housing providers be convened to look at delivering the solutions for challenging cases. Its recommendations should be piloted. This was identified with specific reference to providing accommodation for intentionally homeless people who cannot sustain a Short Scottish Secure Tenancy, but its application may be wider.

## 3. Developing ways of working

An important theme of the HTF report is to look beyond **what** organisations do to **how** they do it. This raises a number of important issues: the culture of organisations, how they engage service users and the extent to which they work corporately or in partnership.

1. The starting point for joint working for everyone involved in homelessness and related areas is knowing what is around (e.g. it would be useful to have "route maps" which set

out what housing and other supports are available to homeless people). National and local audits of services available for homeless people were suggested. Among other ways, council web sites, local forums and one-stop shops were suggested as information points about local services.

2. There are concerns over the extent to which local authority departments will sign up to their corporate homelessness responsibilities. There is some difficulty interpreting this. Council staff recognise that corporate working cannot be anything other than a local responsibility. However, they seek support in making these changes. Some examples of such support might involve Communities Scotland in the way it regulates councils; the development of more model protocols (eg for shared assessments or joint training); and the Scottish Executive taking a lead in demonstrating how national departments are working towards common goals.

3. Timescales for implementing the HTF action plan must allow time for all organisations that must be involved to sign up. Partnerships may in some cases need to be formalised to ensure everyone involved is fully committed for example by using local service level (or other) agreements. Joint training would help organisations work together. There is an important point about homelessness strategies here. A clear message needs to go out that strategies are about processes and do not stop in April 2003. Organisations need to be reassured that they will be assessed against the direction of policy and practice change and not just on whether they have done everything by a certain date.

4. Changing the culture of homelessness services, and people's perceptions of that culture, will require everyone involved in any way with homelessness to change their working practices. Transparent services that are honest with homeless people about what is available (housing, support, etc) will have better relationships with their clients and homeless people's expectations will be realistic. As a starting point all training programmes need to challenge prejudices and raise awareness. In the end homeless people should be treated as customers of services and never stigmatised, but such a change in culture will take time.

5. It is recognised that the Homelessness Etc (Scotland) Bill 2002 may lead to a culture shift from "no you can't have a house" but "yes you can and here is how we do it" and most saw this as a positive change which needs to be shared more generally. However, there is a difficulty in overhauling existing working practices – perhaps from staff who have been working in one way for a long time. It will not happen overnight.

6. At a practical level, a theme that came up frequently was the importance of joint or shared assessments of people's needs. While there is longstanding agreement about the value of these, they are often still a low priority. This may reflect the culture around homelessness which we have inherited: which is one of homeless people being "tested". This does not lead to an assessment process where people feel they can be frank with staff about all aspects of their housing history. This could change for the better.

7. There is, then, a challenge for staff in developing a new working culture. But the challenge is for not for staff alone. Service culture draws upon wider attitudes to homeless people and these too need to be challenged. Two specific areas were identified: attitudes of the general public and those of councillors.

8. As regards the general public there was some discussion about the value of a public attitudes campaign, similar to those covering domestic abuse, racism or mental health. While such campaigns are generally viewed favourably, any comparable effort in the field of homelessness would need to be based on an assessment of whether such campaigns are actually effective. There is a risk that ineffective campaigns are regarded as a waste of money by homeless people themselves ("why are you spending money on TV commercials when what I need is a house?")

9. Councillors were not invited to these seminars as they were designed to engage staff directly involved in delivering the recommendations; these included Local Authority staff, whose contribution may have been restrained by the presence of local politicians. However, it is important that councillors are engaged fully with the HMG process and a

concern that, at the moment, they may not share the consensus on and positive attitude towards the HTF report. While one of the HMG members is, of course, a local authority councillor, with that exception it is not always easy to identify who the local political champions of homelessness as a policy priority might be. The HMG might consider some joint work with CoSLA or with the Scottish Local Government Information Unit, to develop better links with councillors. Options might include a packaged briefing session, delivered locally or some kind of national event.

10. Finally, and probably most importantly, ways of working need to develop according to an ongoing engagement with homeless people themselves. A range of methods of consultation were suggested, e.g. that homeless people need to be included in working groups, consultations, seminars, focus groups and invited proactively to access services. User feedback about homelessness services should be collected as standard (satisfaction surveys and other methods were suggested). To keep homeless people informed about the HMG's work options include: specific leaflets or a national publicity campaign (see above).

The HMG has already been looking specifically at how to continue to engage with service users. It is worth noting that relatively few organisations attending the seminars took up the invitation to attend with service users.

#### 4. Staff, Recruitment and Training

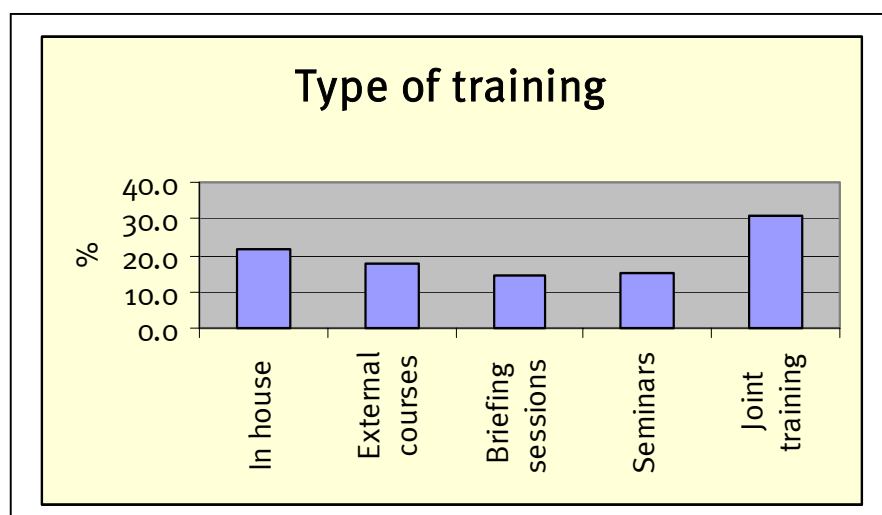
The HMG programme involves a huge amount of development in the next ten years. To carry this programme through requires sufficient numbers of well-trained and well-informed staff. We asked attendees their views on training and information.

#### **Training**

1. The priority topics should be:

- Training on new and proposed legislation (22%).
- Ongoing training on policy and practice aspects of the HTF/HMG's work (20%).
- Training on issues around providing support for homeless people (13%)
- Training on providing advice and assistance (11%)
- Training on partnership working and culture change (10%).
- Training on benefits changes suggested in the HTF report (7%).
- Other training issues included: regulation, homelessness strategies, homelessness and health, housing management, the role of RSLs and on joint assessments.

2. There is little consensus on the type of training that delegates think is most needed (see the chart below). However, most thought that joint training (with other organisations and departments) would be useful. The value of joint training is not just about the content of the training session. It is also regarded as a very useful way of breaking down cross-departmental or cross-organisational barriers.



3. Those in need of training were identified as:

- All front line staff in all organisations (33%)
- Local authority homelessness and housing officers at all levels (27%)
- Social/support workers (10%)
- Voluntary sector staff and board members and volunteers (11%)
- Local and national politicians and RSL Committee members (10%)
- All health professionals (3%)
- Housing association staff (all levels) (2%)
- Tenant representative organisations and tenants (2%)
- Housing benefits staff (1%)
- Communities Scotland staff (area Office, regulation and inspection, and strategy and policy staff) (1%)
- Other suggestions made during breakout sessions included: the police, training providers, homeless people, the public - especially in local neighbourhoods where homeless people are housed, school children, the media and jobcentre staff.

4. Existing and new staff need to develop new skills in light of recent and ongoing legislative and other policy changes. On the job training and training at induction stage (e.g. shadowing) is needed.

5. The impact of training needs to be monitored by establishing quality standards for all homelessness and related services (much like HomePoint on advice). Staff will then have something for which to aim. A specific package of training, developed and delivered by a body with experience in training, would be useful.

### **Information provision**

1. The feedback forms suggest that guidance or information is needed on a range of areas:

- Recent and ongoing legislative changes (25%)
- Ongoing policy briefings throughout the implementation of the HTF report on all aspects (16%)
- Good practice (12%)
- Timescales on the implementation of the HTF report (13%)
- Housing benefit (9%)
- Support (9%)
- Guidance on regulation (4%)
- User involvement (3%)
- Funding arrangements (3%)
- Others: how to provide feedback to the HMG and guidance on the provision of advice for homeless people

2. 99% of delegates agreed with the idea of a national homelessness website. As well as acting as a source of exchange about emerging practice there was also a view that it should be sufficiently interactive to allow users to share problem-solving.

3. Currently, however, there is inconsistency in how organisations receive information:

- Delegates currently receive general information of use to their organisations in a range of ways. These are: (1) Information sent by the Scottish Executive (16%), (2) Newspapers (12%), (3) Trade press: housing, social work, voluntary sector magazines,

etc (14%), (4) The web (13%), (5) Word of mouth (14%), (6) Conferences and briefing sessions (16%), (7) Professional networks (15%), and (8) Others: Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS), personal interest, Shelter's Housing Advisory Service (SHAS), local networks and from the local council (1%).

- Specific guidance is provided to those working in homelessness and a related field is disseminated in similar but different ways. For example, 129 delegates stated that their organisation receives guidance on Scottish Executive and local authority policy developments. Around 55% receive their materials from the Scottish Executive, 10% from local authorities, 6% each from Shelter, Citizens Advice Scotland and the DWP. Whilst the remainder receive their information through health providers, Communities Scotland, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, a network, COSLA and/or Scottish Council for Single Homeless.

4. As well as the website, the favoured forms of communication nominated by delegates were:

- 43% said electronically via regular e-mails or internet updates.
- 35% suggested a regular newsletter mailout within which important briefings/leaflets could be included.
- 13% suggested regular seminars and seminar feedback. Others suggested as a minimum an annual conference/seminar was required.
- The remaining 8% suggested that existing methods of communication should be used, such as: Shelter's Housing Advisory Service, Citizens Advice Scotland, Chartered Institute of Housing, Scottish Federation of Housing Associations, or the media (national, local and housing trade press)

It is important to recognise other existing networks, such as the Best Value network on homelessness and the recently convened group of Homelessness Strategy Officers hosted by Scottish Council for Single Homeless.

6. The feedback form asked whether delegates thought an annual HMG seminar would be useful. 96% of the 146 delegates who answered a feedback form agreed that it would. An annual event could be timed with the annual progress report on the HMG which delegates also want to see.

7. Finally, as mentioned above, publication of a summarised version of the HMG work programme would help to allay some fears about the pace of change as well as assisting in local planning.

### **Staffing and recruitment**

1. Homelessness and related areas need more skilled people. Staff training alone cannot achieve everything.

2. There is not enough staff across the board. Organisations need money to recruit more staff, but due to the relative unattractiveness of the housing/homelessness sector recruitment and retention of staff is difficult (especially in rural areas), so more money alone will not solve the problem. A "making working in homelessness attractive" advertising campaign was suggested.

3. Recruitment of support/social workers is particularly hard. Suggestions for changing this included: improving the image (and media image) of social workers; initiatives and funding to encourage skilled workers already in the field to get a DipSw; training exemptions that take account of experience and keep people in the workplace; increasing wage levels; provide grants for training; not requiring all support workers to have a social work qualification. Finally a specific accredited training course for housing and homelessness officers in support is needed.

4. Long-term contracts and permanent jobs are needed. In times of change, which is certainly true of the homelessness sector at the moment, pilots and demonstration

projects are important and do help to keep a sense of dynamism about development. However, it is difficult to build a ten year strategy on a series of one year and two year contracts. If used too much and for too long, secondments, attachments and short-term contracts create a low morale culture (due to fear of redundancy, etc) and contribute to the unattractiveness of the sector. This is a problem for short-term funded projects that spend time chasing money. Long term funding can free up staff time. Staffing must be considered in a long term manner if staff are to help implement this ten year homelessness action plan.

#### 5. Challenges for National Homelessness Policy

National homelessness policy is located in a number of bodies.

- a) The HMG brings together some of the national bodies concerned with housing and homelessness, working to a specific plan.
- b) The Homelessness Team in the Scottish Executive, under the direction of the minister, allocates funding and generates policy and guidance.
- c) Communities Scotland has a number of roles: regulating providers; funding and developing national initiatives; and providing local development funding. Communities Scotland also has an important role in assessing and providing feedback on homelessness strategies.

In England, the Homelessness Directorate, placed within central government has had a more public role than the Homelessness Team in the Scottish Executive. There was no general feeling that the English model was appropriate in Scotland (however, as noted below, an identified link person within the HMG was one suggestion). However, concerns were raised that officials in the Scottish Executive were struggling to meet timescales for guidance and regulations and this may get worse, without additional resources. Further, a number of practical issues about national homelessness policy were raised.

1. In exhorting others to take a corporate approach, national government needed to take a lead itself. It was felt that recent guidance from the Home Office on the Misuse of Drugs Act undermined work with some hard-to-reach homeless people. Similar serious reservations were expressed about asylum legislation due to come in early 2003. There was some scepticism about Scottish leverage over the DWP; but, at the same time, recognition that the HTF had, at least, made some inroads.
2. A great deal of onus is being placed on Communities Scotland's regulatory role in guiding local change but concerns were expressed that the agency had neither the current staff levels nor range of experience to deliver effectively.
3. There is some apprehension about the regulatory role on homelessness and also the way in which Communities Scotland will provide feedback on homelessness strategies. The agency needs to re-emphasise that its role is about supporting through change rather than condemning slow progress or failures. On the other hand, it is recognised that a more positive work culture will be about innovation and that means taking risks and being able to concede where programmes have not been successful.
4. Some thought as to how the regulation and assessment role will feed into information dissemination, good practice identification and problem solving would be useful.
5. One of the key areas that needs to be addressed at a national level is money. It is recognised that many of the changes upon which we are embarking are new areas and difficult to cost. However, as local strategies develop it should be possible to assemble some sort of aggregate picture of the scale of unmet need for housing and, even more crucially, support, and therefore to base future funding bids within a national context.
6. Organisations are also critical of the fragmented way in which homelessness money has been channelled in recent years and want to see a more streamlined pot.

The five themed headings in part 2 of the report present, in a very condensed form, some of the challenges and opportunities identified by people attending the seminars. Of

course, the range of opinions varied in different seminars. For example, in Aberdeen, the major concern was housing supply and the distinctive issues facing small or rural areas. In both of the Glasgow seminars, issues around local political leadership were more prominent. However, one of the striking features is how commonly some of the main themes were echoed.

### **PART 3 ROLE IN DELIVERING ON THE HTF ACTION PLAN**

This section considers whether those organisations represented at the HMG seminars felt able to contribute to implementing the HTF report's recommendations.

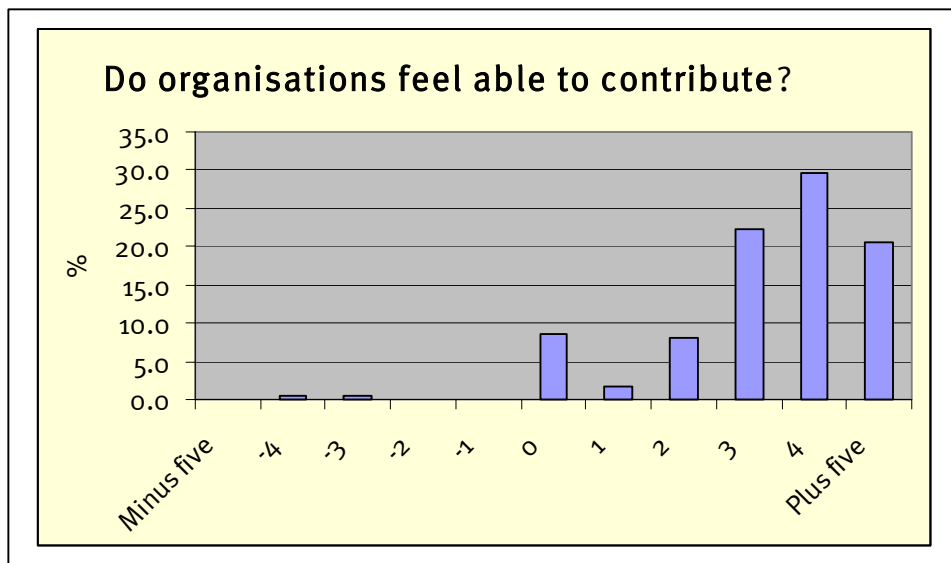
The large majority of the organisations represented at the HMG seminars have taken some steps to look at the implications of the HTF report since it was published in February. Of these:

- 35% said that there has been some internal communications about the HTF report, including: meetings, office e-mails, information briefings and away days (e.g. some councils and RSLs said that they had reviewed their allocations policies and made staff aware of this). A further 4.2% had trained existing staff or employed new staff as a direct result of the report.
- 24% had been involved in external work around the HTF report such as including HTF recommendations in written documents or meetings with other organisations to discuss the implications of the HTF report (e.g. discussions between housing associations and councils).
- 24% said that their organisation had developed or was developing an internal action plan or assessing or had assessed their resource needs around the HTF report (for housing, support, new services, such as rent deposit schemes or furniture initiatives).
- 14% of delegates said that the report's recommendations would be included in a homelessness strategy whose development they were involved with.

Most organisations have therefore already recognised that the HTF report will have considerable impact on their work over the coming years and are beginning to consider its implications. However, on the basis of what they know so far 71% of delegates (who completed this part of the feedback form) identified developments, either in their locality or in the wider policy or practice environment, which they felt would impact on their ability to engage with the recommendations of the Homelessness Task Force. These included:

1. Lack of resources (31%): Finance in general, housing, the need for more staff and more resources for staff training. Delegates were also frustrated about the implications for staffing levels of implementing new legislation whilst maintaining an existing service (13%).
2. Whether partnership working will be successful and whether plans will truly be joined up (will local authority departments sign up to the corporate approach advocated in legislation? Will everyone involved (in any way) sign up to the HTF report's recommendations?). Single shared assessments were seen as crucial to this but concerns were expressed as to whether these would occur consistently.
3. Issues around support (18%). Problems with Supporting People, a lack of social work/support staff, and how to provide support to individuals and families who fail the Scottish Short Secure Tenancy but don't want support were each mentioned.
4. Contradictory national and local policies such as housing benefit and local authority policies on evictions were highlighted by 10%.
5. Other main issues included: (1) will regulation and performance monitoring be effective? Questions were raised about whether Communities Scotland can manage regulation 'and' everything else it has been charged with doing, (2) how stock transfer will fit in with the HTF's action plan, and (3) hostel re-provisioning in Glasgow.

These difficulties did not, however, prevent delegates from expressing confidence that they can contribute to implementing the recommendations of the HTF. The graph below where -5 is nothing and +5 is a great deal illustrates that the majority feel that they are able to contribute. Just 1.2% of delegates felt that they could contribute little or nothing.



The main ways in which they said they could contribute to implementation included:

- Work in partnership (or through consultation etc) with other organisations to ensure that all plans and strategies are tied in together and that a change in the culture of service provision for homeless people is achieved (30%)
- Develop and/or help implement homelessness strategies thereby preventing or alleviating homelessness (20%)
- Provide advice, assistance and/or advocacy (17%)
- Provide support to homeless people (11%)
- Provide training (6%)
- Amongst other suggestions the development of new services for homeless people (rent deposit, employment and training schemes, choice based lettings, etc) stand out.

The large majority of organisations have taken some steps to look at the implications of the HTF report since it was published in February. However, 71% of these identified issues that they felt would impact on their organisation's ability to implement the HTF. Foremost amongst these is lack of resources. That said almost all felt that they could contribute something – from working in partnership with others to providing training – that would help with the implementation of the HTF action plan.

#### **PART 4 WAYS FORWARD**

The HMG should ensure that all the recommendations are being implemented and implemented appropriately. It should monitor this in stages by using feedback from homelessness and related services and national homelessness and housing statistics. Further, to ensure that the spirit of the report is captured the HMG should ensure that best practice guidance in all necessary areas is disseminated.

It should work with a range of organisations towards placing timescales against each recommendation and provide feedback to homelessness and related organisations on the progress of the HTF's action plan on an annual basis. It was suggested that the HMG should appoint one person as a homelessness co-ordinator who can be the link between the HMG and those involved in providing services for homeless people.

Below we consider what delegates felt to be the main challenges and opportunities ahead for the HMG.

#### **4.1 The main challenges**

1. 53% of delegates feel that the main challenge will be one of resources:

- 14% say there will not be enough finance available – capital or revenue – and homelessness and related organisations will struggle to stretch existing resources.
- 15% say that providing an adequate supply of decent quality housing will be the main challenge
- 13% say the main challenge will be providing support as there are concerns about: the size of the Supporting People pot, whether the funding will be long term, whether pipeline projects will get 100% funding and how to fund those types of support not funded by Supporting People.
- 8% say that there will not be a sufficient number of trained motivated staff.
- 2% said that there will not be enough time.

2. 24% say that changing the culture of services through joint working with other organisations will be the challenge. A further 4% said that changing the way Scotland thinks about homeless people would be the challenge, e.g. changing people's views of homeless drug users

3. 9% said that implementing legislative changes would be the challenge, especially the removal of the priority need and local connection criteria.

4. Other challenges which received attention included: changing local and national policies which conflict with the recommendations of the HTF; housing the most difficult tenants; ensuring that the regulator does its job effectively.

#### **4.2 The main opportunities**

1. The main opportunity (with 39%) was resources and the opportunities presented in the report to attract more finance for: tackling homelessness, providing housing (and more choices of housing), providing support, recruiting and training more staff and providing more advice, information, assistance and advocacy services.

2. In second place (considered by 37%) was the opportunity presented in the HTF report and the ongoing work of the HMG to change the culture of services through the changing role of local authorities (from rationer to facilitator) and partnership working with a range of organisations. It was felt that this would help to prevent homelessness and reduce repeat homelessness.

3. In third place (with 14%) was the opportunity to challenge perceptions of homeless people across Scotland. The public, staff in homelessness and related organisations and councillors/committee members (in local authorities and RSLs) each warranted a mention. In addition, many stated that they welcomed the continued shift in government thinking towards homelessness

4. In fourth place (at 7%) came the opportunity to change local and national policies which conflict with the recommendations of the HTF (e.g. housing benefit and local authority policies on evictions).

The seminar delegates have set some challenges for the HMG. They want to see each of the recommendations implemented in full (though what this means in some areas requires clarifying) and sufficient resources made available to achieve this.

To do this they want to see the HMG:

- playing a role in lobbying for additional funding for homelessness and related services
- working with a range of organisations to iron out contradictory policies
- helping to ensure that partnership working takes place

- helping to ensure that a change in the culture of homelessness services is achieved across Scotland
- ensuring that the 99% of delegates who asked for good practice guidance receive it
- monitoring progress on implementation and providing feedback to all the organisations involved in the 10 year action plan

### **Priorities**

Often, when asked about priorities, frontline staff respond in quite generalised terms: classically, to ask for more resources. The message about resources is one which is echoed throughout this report and it is not to diminish its importance to outline more specific priorities as well. To do this we asked seminar attendees to imagine they had £5 million extra funds available and to tell us what they would spend it on.

1. 33% said a range of affordable housing options in urban and rural areas (including supported housing).
2. 22% said more support (including more advice and assistance). More money to provide it and more staff to deliver it.
3. 20% suggested more permanent staff (and higher wages) in all areas and more staff training.
4. 12% suggested initiatives such as those on: employment and training, community development (social networks etc), empty homes, rent guarantee schemes (and other private rented sector schemes), furniture schemes, information sharing databases, awareness raising (of the work of the HTF and about homelessness), health and homelessness (e.g. drugs and homelessness work); one stop shops for homelessness and related services; mediation services, etc.
5. 6% said they would repair/refurbish/upgrade existing housing

Other main points included: more outreach and 24 hour services, more money for rural areas, better regulation, and changes to the benefits system.

Outwith this context, many ideas for new initiatives or extending existing ones were suggested. These would need funding, but there is a lack of clarity over where funding would come from. New initiatives suggested include: community mediation projects; peer education projects; early intervention projects (prisoners projects, care leavers projects, army exit projects, etc); flexible housing and support projects; rent deposit schemes (and other private rented sector facilitation projects); street outreach projects; pilot alternatives to evictions (eg an evictions “amnesty”); one stop shops/access points; lead tenancies; rural lease schemes; local and national directories of homelessness and related projects; rural community schemes (to tackle special needs of hard to reach areas); develop good practice guidance; and supported employment schemes.

Housing, support, and the staff to provide either or both to homeless households is where the majority of delegates would spend any additional money allocated to them in their areas. In addition, there are many initiatives that could help prevent and alleviate homelessness and related problems in Scotland that need additional resourcing or to be resourced for the first time.

### **IV CONCLUSIONS**

This report suggests that the job of convincing homelessness and related practitioners about the importance of the work of the HTF/HMG has in most cases been successfully begun. Delegates feel positively about the 10 year plan laid out by the HTF. They were enthusiastic about working jointly with other organisations to achieve the aims of the report. Similarly, organisations expressed a great willingness to change their practices and organisational culture to achieve the aspirations of the HTF action plan. All this suggests a shift in the attitudes of many people working in homelessness and related organisations.

Delegates were less convinced about whether political commitment to homelessness will last and more especially whether critical resources will be made available over the longer term. This report indicates that some are already becoming cynical about the action plan,

most commonly because delegates did not expect recent legislative changes to be backed by more resources.

However, this is a unique time in homelessness policy. There has never been such a positive attitude towards change but that positive attitude could easily be soured if momentum is not sustained and if funding proves to be a major barrier. Clearly, some of the challenges posed by practitioners will take money: most obviously, more and better houses; and bridging the gap in support. But others – like communication, more staff, better training and piloting provision for the small number of people who are difficult to engage – need not cost a lot.