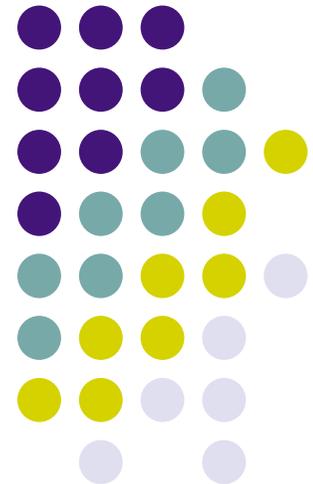


# **SUPPORTING HOMELESS PEOPLE**

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**Research for Shelter Scotland**

**Dr Ann Rosengard and Alice Ann Jackson**



# The study



- To review the implications of the new duty on local authorities to assess the housing support needs of homeless applicants who are:
  - unintentionally homeless
  - or threatened with homelessness in 2 months
  - and in priority need.
- The study took place from October to December 2011, and so preceded the Scottish Government consultation document (Jan 2012).

# The study



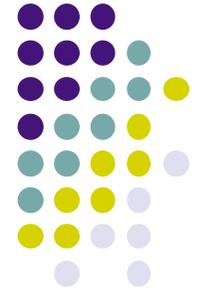
- We carried out a literature review and an interview programme with:
  - representatives of national organisations (10+)
  - homelessness managers in 10 Scottish local authorities in urban and rural districts across the 5 local authority hub areas.
- The interviews invited comment on aspects of the new duty and on what would assist successful implementation.

# Key Findings



- Views on the duty varied, but there were no clear differences between national & local views.
- some consultees had participated in the debate that preceded the duty, when views ranged from whole-hearted to qualified support, to opposition.
- others felt unable to “*comment on the detail ... nor on the position across local authority areas*”.
- The duty was seen as, “*ground breaking*”, not least because the duty to assess needs is coupled with “*a clear duty to provide services*”.

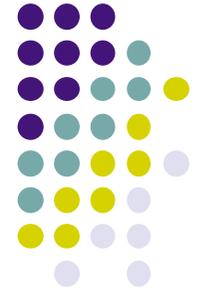
# Findings



- **Key concerns** - related to *resource implications* and that *housing support might be skewed* to tackle homelessness rather than prevention.
- **Broad agreement** that *systematic assessment* of housing support needs and the *provision* of housing support are crucial.

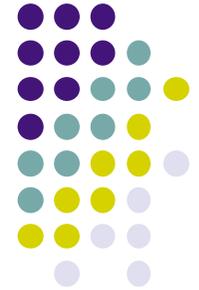
*“I think local authorities broadly agree with the aim underpinning the legislation ... by and large they engage with the spirit of 2012”. (national)*

# Particular Issues highlighted by Interviewees



- Questions about *implementation and future regulations* included:
  - Might regulations restrict a person-centred approach?
  - “How tightly will housing support be defined?”
  - “Will the time-frame of support be restrictive?”
  - “When can the duty be discharged?”

# Other issues



- How soon must support be provided?
- Regarding the *discharge of duty* it was felt -
  - the point of discharge may be less easy to specify e.g. when a homeless person has not engaged with support
  - may be less clear when working with needs that are multiple, complex and continuing
- Some wanted guidance to clarify issues and maximise consistency.

# Gearing Up



- The local authorities consulted were all reflecting on and gearing up to the duty.
- Across areas there was evidence of real progress in housing support services in quantity, range and joint working over recent years.
- Housing support plays a role in both housing options/ prevention and homelessness.
- Despite financial constraints, found examples of good practice, creativity and joint work in H.S..

# Recommendations (tentative)



- Guidance to maximise consistent standards;
  - Revise Code of Guidance?
- Any future Regulations and Guidance should:
  - maximise flexibility of definition and time-frames of support so housing support can meet varying needs via a person centred response.
  - clarify when duty may be considered discharged
  - address how staff may best interpret “reason to believe” to achieve consistency and transparency.

# Other matters for Regulations or Guidance



- How local authorities may best fulfil the duty to assess the support needs of those ‘residing with’ the applicant.
- The status of a housing support assessment that was carried out before presentation.
- The responsibilities of other departments e.g. for those needing long-term/ continuing support.

# Implications for housing and homelessness services



- To ensure awareness of the new duty amongst ‘budget holders’ & commissioners.
- Assess need to review:
  - assessment and planning;
  - interview and assessment tools across homelessness, housing support, options;
  - scope for shared support needs assessment;
  - training needs and potential for joint training;
  - consolidating working groups e.g. mental health.

# Wider Implications



- **Training needs analysis** possibly together with local Hubs and providers of housing support and information and advice.
- **Local publicity** materials will need updated, including by information and advice services. Shelter and SCSH could play a role?
- **Monitoring** may require updating and guidance – will need to clarify specific/ additional information requirements and key outcome measures.

# Key Messages



- There is considerable support for the duty
- Reflection and preparation has begun
- Need for clarification of elements of the duty
- Some felt the duty won't notably change current practice
- There is a clear need to monitor funding and capacity to meet the requirements of the duty by local and national stakeholders.