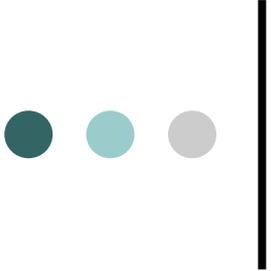# Managing homelessness without housing

Mary Taylor
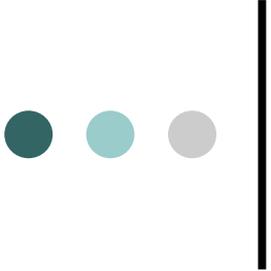
On secondment to SHR

from University of Stirling

June 2008

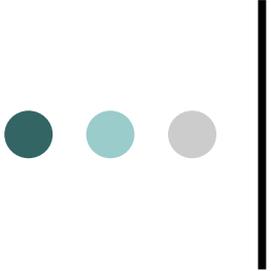# Outline

- Research commission & rationale
- Methods used
- Findings
- Conclusions
- Implications
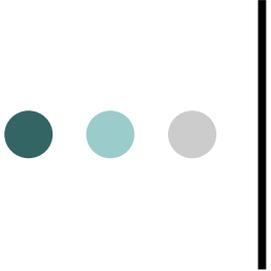
Commission and rationale

Aspiration to ensure that services to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness should be at least as good as it would have been if transfer had not happened

- Previous report – *What about me?*
- Highlight issues to inform
  - organisational improvements and inspections of transfers to date
  - preparation of policy framework in the event of future transfers
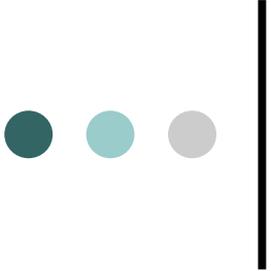   - inc ALMOs

Approach

- Review of literature
  - Others' research
  - Policy documents
  - Including Scotland & England
- Data examination
  - HL1, APSR, SCORE
  - All 2005/06
- Case studies
  - Four at different stages
    - Argyll & Bute, Borders, Glasgow, Inverclyde
  - Analysis of documents and interviews
- Seminar / focus group
- Short report including case study summaries
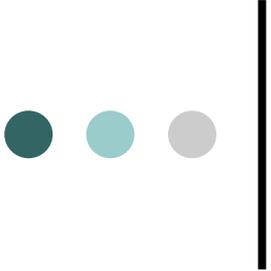 - Available May 08 via SCSH website

Findings (1)

- Guidance very limited
  - primary focus on investment and on securing yes votes
  - Limited engagement either by transfer project teams or by staff working in homelessness
    - With exception of Argyll and Bute
- Services mainly kept in councils
  - Elements of assistance contracted for advice services
  - Some leasing of temporary accommodation from transfer RSLs and others
- Service typically based in Social Work
  - Not always first port but most suitable 'home'
  - Staff mainly from housing background
  - Challenge to secure and retain sufficient staff, to develop and integrate, share information
  - Often separated from other housing services – strategy, HB, private sector
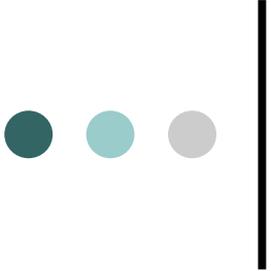
Findings (2)

- 'Residual' service – according to guidance
  - Councillors' role and perspective - disinterest?
    - View homelessness as a landlord matter – for others
    - Consequences for securing priorities
  - Adequacy of resources depends on professional championship of service needs
    - Imagination, ability to persuade, evidence to make case
- Access to housing
  - Protocols at point of transfer – different arrangements
    - practice not entirely satisfactory: many problems
      - Resistance to binding agreements
      - Culture of information
  - Nominations and referrals in use
    - Void led vs applicant led
    - Formal vs informal 'referral'
  - Blockages in accessing housing
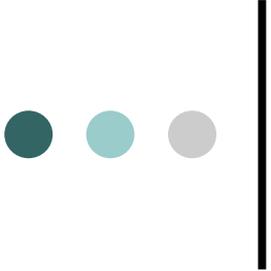   - increased use of temporary accommodation

Findings (3)

- Culture of relationships between councils and providers

  - Former colleagues
    - Focus on maintaining goodwill: intentions vs outcomes
    - Presume continuity, and avoid conflict?

- Monitoring and data collection low priority to date

  - Council recording weak beyond official requirements
    - Initially reliant on RSL recording of referrals
  - Contradictory evidence
    - Cannot tell whether or how homeless people being housed
    - Clear that more applicants in any year than lettings made to those recorded as homeless
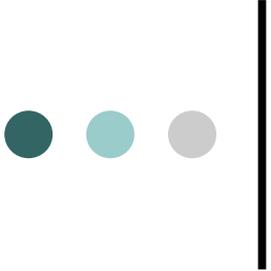
Conclusions

- Commitment of staff in councils not in doubt
  - Undermined by lack of policy, planning and implementation
  - Guidance and approval process weak: services left exposed
- Planning weak in early transfers with consequences & resources
  - Money and staffing
- Relationships working through – need to mature
- Transfer challenges
  - role of state in housing
    - ethos of housing management

Implications

- Issues concern situations without transfer
  - Underlying question of how housing management perceives and treats homeless applicants
    - Systems and rationing
    - Community rights approach
    - cf Social Work
      - Individual rights approach
- Review framework in guidance – policy and approval mechanisms at transfer
  - Better preparation at local scale
- Resources for services
  - championship and implementation
- Focus on data about access to housing
  - Align various sources and reporting

Questions for discussion

- Are the findings relevant in areas without transfer?

- Does section 5 really matter as long as homeless people are housed?

- Is there a difference between the way the housing and social work professions view and treat homeless applicants? Is it material ?