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Final Report

H.E.L.P.

*Year One Evaluation of West
London Housing Partnership
Integrating Employment and
Training Assistance for
Homeless people.*

May 2009

fluid thinking

Introduction

HELP was established by the West London Housing Partnership in 2007 with a two part brief:

- to establish mechanisms to refer and engage homeless households in training and employment, with a two year grant
- to establish systems in housing providers, IAG providers, and other stakeholders, to ensure long term delivery of referrals and improved access to training and employment for homeless households in temporary accommodation

CLG supported the initiative with a grant of approximately £290k, and as part of the conditions asked for an independent evaluation of the project after the first year.

This report is in six parts –

Section One:	Review of main targets for HELP
Section Two:	Staff focus group report
Section Three:	Client feedback
Section Four:	Feedback from IAG and Housing Providers
Section Five:	Assessment of the sustainability of HELP
Section Six:	Conclusion and recommendations

The evaluation looks at the management and direction of HELP and makes three main assessments:

- Has the HELP project provided value for money?
- How effectively does it engage with homeless households?
- Has it established durable systems that will continue after the first two years?

Section One

Employment and training targets

CLG provided funding for 2 years and targets were included in the funding bid. The HELP manager started in mid-September 2007 and 2 project staff were seconded in October that year. Training of housing staff commenced in March 2008 and the first referrals were made and recorded on the database in April 2008.

The 2 project staff have returned to their substantive posts thereby reducing the team to one. Additional funding has been secured via CLG's Enhanced Housing Options programme to fund the HELP Manager for a further 18 months until March 2011 to embed the culture change that HELP has driven.

HELP has a management board that meets every 6 weeks and reviews progress on targets. This report is based on data for the period ending March 30th. References in this report to estimated final outcomes relate to what is likely to be achieved by the end of September 2009 as reported to us. The most recent report has been provided by the HELP team for the period ending March 30th 2009, with brief comments -

Targets:

1. 300 staff trained
2. 1,700 people referred into IAG provision
3. 170 into employment
4. 300 into training
5. 15,000 households in sub region contacted re: IAG provision

Progress:

1. Met and exceeded
2. 1,792 conversations about employment and training aspirations have been held by frontline staff and recorded on the HELP database. 1,006 people have said they are interested in employment and training and 786 people have said no. Work on the database is being completed so accurate reports on referrals into IAG can be run. At present this is difficult to do as data inputting is unreliable.
3. 22 into employment to date (although one has a later start date).
4. Reports are as reliable as information inputted on the database. Staff in IAG providers are not carrying out this recording reliably and consistently
5. TA household numbers have been reduced to 11,000. Mail out to these households has been met in most boroughs and will be completed by September 2009.

Project outcomes to date, by borough:

Borough	Those saying yes to employment & training	Those saying no to employment & training	In training	Jobs
<i>Brent</i>	150	188	6	5
<i>Ealing</i>	91	66	1	1
<i>H&F</i>	363	193	5	10
<i>Harrow</i>	45	176	1	0
<i>Hillingdon</i>	252	60	2	1
<i>Hounslow</i>	27	44	5	1
<i>RBKC</i>	78	39	2	4
Totals	1006	786	22	22

From this report it is clear that several of the original targets will not be met. The HELP management board minutes over the last year have noted the progress on these targets, and this evaluation is not required to go over these previous discussions.

It is important to note that the monitoring and discussion has taken place, and this reflects a capacity for planning and priority setting in the HELP project.

In the period January to March 2009 a number of actions have been undertaken to revise the figures and improve or complete targets – the main effort has been to:

- Complete training and systems for participating staff
- Identify the number of IAG referrals – more work is needed on reporting this from the database as it is still unclear how many referrals have been made. However, clear action has been taken to improve the referrals and the relationship with IAG providers. This looks to have improved significantly in recent months
- Update records of employment – IAG updating records has been very poor, and the original target has been found to be over-ambitious. Updating records indicates the likely final outcome for employment will be around 35. It should be noted that the ambitious employment targets were set before the country fell into a deep recession. This will have affected not only the number of jobs available for HELP clients, but also the perception of clients in thinking that there may not be any jobs available – this is likely to have impacted on engagement numbers.

- Referrals taking up training are also poorly recorded by IAG providers and the best estimate is around 50 by the end of the project
- Total contacts targeted was revised early on in the light of the total households in temporary accommodation, and is likely to meet the new goal of 11,000 households.

Benchmarking with similar W2W projects

HELP is an innovative project and has few meaningful comparators. A similar aim of working with homeless people has been pioneered by Off the Streets and Into Work (OSW). Direct comparisons are still very difficult for two reasons:

- HELP has been designed to set up a service and then operate without the start up staff team – which implies a high concentration of costs for a short time followed by very much lower running costs. OSW has a permanent fixed overhead and running costs but has defrayed the initial start up cost some time ago
- OSW uses specialist, trained staff to support homeless people in partnership with other agencies. In contrast HELP is developing a process to ‘bend the mainstream’ and use existing staff and services to achieve similar results.

The most recent national evaluation of W2W activity was completed by the National Audit Office in 2007. This evaluation helpfully separates out intensive services and those working with severe social exclusion from other, more mainstream activity. In the former group are projects working with excluded young people, in very deprived neighbourhoods. Making direct comparisons with HELP is not possible because these area based initiatives have clients in a wider range of housing circumstances, and always much closer to the advice worker/centre.

We can assume that the homeless households in HELP are generally in very high need (often experiencing multiple problems), and at high risk of long-term unemployment. For these reasons the most appropriate comparison will be with intensive area based initiatives.

The report provides an indicator of the range of costs, and the NAO found intensive services had a unit cost of £5,000 - £7,000 per job placement. If we assume similar achievement rates are maintained, then, the first two years of HELP will place 35 clients into jobs at a total cost of £266K grant (this figure includes a projected under spend of £29K) – this gives a unit cost of approximately £7,600 per job found. However, care should be taken with the use of this figure as undertaking detailed unit cost calculations within an interim evaluation can be misleading.

The project has secured £40k pa for a further two years, with modified targets – 60+ jobs pa. It will be important to continue to monitor the service and real costs, as the unit cost of job and training placements will be very much lower, and at the bottom of end of most W2W contracts, but still focused on households in a crisis.

As well as looking at the monetary value for money indicators above, it is also possible to think of value for money through changing the culture of mainstream services. While it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to quantify this, the potential of changing behaviours and attitudes of staff in housing services to think about and engage with the employment field could be a long lasting, high value success of the programme. While it is quite early to be able to say whether such behavioural changes have taken place, there are some signs of change (see sections two and four). Additionally, the HELP model has also influenced the delivery models of some other programmes (e.g. West London Working's Outreach and Guidance Project and West London Working 's new ESF project, New Pathways to Work in West London).

Conclusion

The HELP project has made significant progress, and on current performance provides reasonable value for money compared to other W2W working with clients in acute need and multiple deprivation.

As the project gets integrated further into mainstream services, it is expected that unit costs will be reduced significantly. This will be the critical test for the next two years – if the systems are robust and rely on minimal revenue support; the unit cost of jobs and training placements will be very good value for money.

Additionally, HELP appears to be successfully influencing the delivery of other projects through replication of what is seen to be an effective model.

Section Two

Staff focus group

Introduction

The focus group was held in Ealing council, and was attended by twelve officers of the participating councils.

Matters raised by the officers mainly led the discussion, and it was agreed all contributions would be anonymised to ensure everyone felt free to fully air their views.

These notes are not intended to be a verbatim account. We have analysed the subjects that were raised and organised them into the main themes that they represent.

The discussion covered eight main points. Each one is presented under a heading, with an overall summary of the free flowing discussion, and the main points that were specifically agreed by the group –

1. Information for clients

Overall

The group felt more could be done to produce simple information to encourage participation

Main points

- The leaflet is useful but needs enhancing with other supporting material
- Clients would benefit from more information about what IAGs can do, and some examples or case histories
- Some specialist or targeted leaflets or information would be useful for difficult to engage clients such as those on incapacity benefits – for example an emphasis on training and long term goals
- Clients with literacy and learning difficulties need specially prepared information, and staff wondered if there is a more intensive/specialist IAG service?

2. Engagement of clients

Overall

The group believes many clients appreciated the offer of referral, but we needed more focus on winning enthusiasm and engagement from clients

Main points

Many clients are disempowered by months, or longer, of personal crisis, and the offer of referral doesn't seem to be 'real' or immediate to their needs

The group concluded some incentives, with goals that mean something, would make a difference – such as –

- Additional housing points – so clients can see the connection with investing effort now to relieve their immediate crisis
- Is it possible to offer moves within temporary accommodation to be nearer family etc? Staff recognise the constraints on the accommodation, but it could be used as an incentive
- Develop a different approach to temporary accommodation – something like floating support – wherein the costs go down as the client participates in more training and employment (The group did not discuss the problems with HB, but agreed this would be a major problem)
- More one to one time from support workers or IAG in temporary accommodation or council offices
- More information and assistance in accessing training

3. Barriers to participation

Overall

The group agreed that the system of temporary accommodation, benefits, and the long term nature of many problems for individual clients, reduced the potential pool of participating clients

Main points

- The high costs of temporary accommodation were a major disincentive for all potential referrals

- The group agreed that clients on long term incapacity benefits were very reluctant to discuss referral and blamed it on the fear of losing income
- Parents with young children were reluctant because of the difficulties of looking after children in temporary accommodation, and sceptical that childcare would be available or maintained
- Clients with learning difficulties did not engage with the offer of referral

4- Follow-up for clients

Overall

The group agreed that the system needed a planned follow up for referrals to find out what they are doing, encourage participation, and offer further signposting and support

Main points

- The clients have often experienced long-term personal crises and to change, clients need more support. They often have very low expectations of services and poor self-esteem and so many would benefit from more support from the housing agencies
- A planned follow up procedure would help change the homelessness system – it would change staff expectations as well as the client experience.
- More follow up might help plan other aspects of housing – such as developing incentives and challenging any ‘dependency culture’

5. Work planning for housing staff

Overall

The group observed that working arrangements were different in each authority, and that critical issues such as the time allocated for HELP work varied, and resources such as a local champion or link person, were sometimes absent or gave HELP a lower priority.

Main points

- Each authority could usefully agree a minimum format, time allocation, and targets for referral interviews.

- The group agreed that referral interviews should not be done in the initial contact with a new client, but should be introduced later in the assessment and housing process.
- Consideration should be given to agreeing common priority groups for the HELP referrals – for example setting targets of, say 100% of JSA claimants, but reducing the effort on very vulnerable groups and families with very young children.
- Each authority should ensure a lead officer is given time and support to promote and support HELP with colleagues
- Local surgeries and presentations about IAGs and HELP would serve to reinforce work practice and get the message out to clients

6. Feedback and information about HELP

Overall

The group was enthusiastically supporting the project, but felt the lack of a feedback flow of information was frustrating and holding the project back.

Main points

- Staff introducing clients to HELP want more information about local systems. For example the group agreed they don't know how and when referrals are followed up, and want more information to be able to advise clients.
- The weakness or lack of IAG provider feedback about referrals was very frustrating, and is a missed opportunity to build support for HELP.
- A frequent newsletter or printable briefings from emails would help staff and clients understand what is available from IAGs, colleges, employers etc
- Changing a highly pressured system like homelessness needs a “hearts and minds” campaign all the time – more positive information would help improve the focus on HELP

7. Contact with IAG Providers

Overall

Staff report contact with IAG Providers was poor, and needs to be improved to sustain HELP. Without improved links staff believe the project will not progress beyond a small percentage of the potential group

Main points

- More information on the offer from IAGs will improve referrals and advice to clients
- Regular meetings with IAG providers, or regular bulletins, would help build knowledge and confidence in staff.
- Surgeries and presentations in housing offices would be useful points of contact and help staff and clients understand IAG better.

8. Contact with employers

Overall

The group agreed that some contact with employers who offer work experience, or recruit would be helpful. In particular the group suggested the councils and RSLs developed a work experience and recruitment strategy to support HELP referrals.

Main points

- The councils and RSLs are major employers – the HELP clients are very vulnerable and often have long-term experience of worklessness. The public and third sectors might provide work experience and intermediate labour market opportunities.
- More links with employers and offers of assistance would be effective incentives and help change both staff and client expectations.

9. Good practice

Overall

The group agreed a number of good practice points that can improve the work of HELP in the future. It is reasonable to give the name of the boroughs because many examples were discussed and these were the best received, and the support of the group does not breach the confidentiality of the participants

Main points

- Lead officer with resources to support HELP staff and referral process – Hammersmith and Fulham have a member of staff with some time to pursue this, and the group believes it makes a real difference to the delivery of the service

- Improving the quality of interviews and referrals – Hillingdon has made a lot of progress and this is partly a result of increased senior management support
- Closer relations with IAG providers – the surgeries held in Ealing reception area were highlighted as a resource to offer across the area
- Closer relations with IAG providers – the group supported the inclusion of providers in the local steering groups and service agreements

Conclusions

The group was animated and the discussion was lively. There was a genuine enthusiasm for the aims of the HELP project and on many occasions participants began by saying they believed in changing the homeless system to offer more choice and empowerment to their clients.

The whole group generally agreed the points listed above, although we avoided voting and formal consensus to allow the discussion to develop.

At the end of the session the group was asked to make two main points, and these form a fitting conclusion :

- HELP is an important improvement on the current homelessness system because it gives choice, explains options, and empowers homeless people.
- HELP needs important improvements to become sustainable –
 - more information and links with IAG agencies to support staff
 - some common standards of service
 - agreement on priorities for targeting clients
 - new incentives and the use of council and RSL resources to assist clients

Section Three

Interviews with clients

Introduction

The evaluation originally planned to discuss the client experience of HELP in focus groups. When we sampled the 1,000+ contacts on the database it became apparent that travel and timing was likely to make recruiting a reasonable cross section of the client group very difficult. The dispersal of households across London and the reported difficulty in maintaining contact with essential appointments in the benefits and homelessness system suggested we should change our approach.

The HELP database provides a phone or other contact for clients. This provides a means of conducting an interview with a wide range of locations and households with little inconvenience. The interview is shorter than a focus group, however we can compensate for this by greatly increasing the number of participants.

We conducted 71 interviews with clients who accepted the offer of a referral, and 31 who declined the HELP service.

The interview schedules were short and designed to be effective phone interviews, and so did not expect a long conversation or access to documents, or other prompts and supporting information. Each interview lasted approximately 12-15 minutes.

Responses

The respondents were roughly representative of the HELP target client group, as shown by this comparison with the January 2009 progress report and the borough of origin from the telephone database.

source - Jan 2009 report to steering group

Borough	Those saying yes to employment & training	Those saying no to employment & training	percent of HELP	Tele-phone respondents	tele-phone percent
Brent	110	136	25%	18	18%
Ealing	31	57	9%	14	14%
H&F	138	81	23%	20	20%
Harrow	23	112	14%	9	9%
Hillingdon	193	58	26%	23	23%
Hounslow	20	33	5%	6	6%
RBKC	57	17	8%	12	12%
Totals	472	494	100%	102	

We did not attempt to contact a fully representative sample of other aspects of the client records – such as household style, ethnicity, health indicators and benefits etc. The time available made this impossible, and this was beyond the scope of the proposed evaluation.

Findings

The two groups of respondent – agree to referral, and refuse IAG referral – had a very high level of agreement on the main issues we discussed –

Have you had previous contact with employment and training advisors (eg IAG)?

Only 14 respondents reported that they had previous contact with an IAG provider. In the discussion time available it was clear the group was used to the job centre, but had very low expectations of advice and guidance from any agency they had previous contact with.

Some responses give a picture of the range of the conversation –

to be frank, I don't really know, I mean you get these interviews, but my head isn't into it, I need some help, but the job centre isn't the place...

I have had a cv done for me by (IAG provider) in September (2008), and I made some job applications, and plans, but I have to sort out my kids now, you cant make yourself safe with a bit of paper, it is in the future for me...

in and out...in and out...its always interview, proof of identity, passwords....in and out.....when I get settled it will be time, my time....I cant tell you who said what to me today never mind last week....yeah I probably met them, but I mean I need a place first

Did you welcome the option to discuss employment and training with the homeless service staff?

The respondents were very positive about the HELP referral process. No one complained or suggested it was irrelevant. This was an unexpected result. There was evidence of scepticism of the likely outcome, but the offer of options for personal choice and development were warmly received.

Some responses give a picture of the range of conversations –

You feel like an object in this system, appointments, and more appointments, interviews, and nothing, nothing.....nothing

promised.....it was good to think about settling down and having my own life again....my own place and job.....yeah

..there's a lot of interviews and waiting, how much waiting can you do, I mean the waiting rooms are like my real home till this is sorted.....it was good to talk about me and where I am going, like it isn't stuck, like I am moving on...it was good

a bit surprised, but she was really keen to explain and didn't make any promises, and I respected her for it, and she was doing something that was important. I didn't expect a lot of help actually, but I think she is genuine. You can get help from these people...

Was the referral process explained clearly to you?

Although respondents were warmly supportive of the discussion with the housing staff about employment and training, they had very little understanding of what would happen next, and when. Most respondents said they understood the offer of help with training and employment, but understood little more about the detail of the process

Some responses give a picture of the range of conversations –

...what happens next...no I didn't think about it.....maybe it was a phone call or next interview.....

I got a call from (IAG provider) about a week later maybe, they made an appointment and I went along, I don't know if you can make it easy to understand.....there's quite a lot on offer.....no I wasn't really clear...but it was something I wanted.....

I had help from the job centre plus (2007) and had a college place last year, so I know the form, she (HELP referrer) were clear and honest, you know, like she didn't really know what I would get.....

Do you plan or hope to enter employment or training in the next year?

Fifty five respondents said they hoped to be in training and/or work within a year – this is slightly lower than other recent surveys but in a small survey it a reasonable indicator of the desire for work and training in the HELP target group

Some responses give a picture of the range of conversations –

Oh god yeah, I have to get something, if I get a break I am right there, on it

No...no....I just want to get back to (home borough) and make a home me and (child)....but a college place would beI did social care, it's a way out isn't it...it would be a start....make us a family

I want to... but it isn't realistic, it's just not going to happen.....not till everything else is sorted out.....I mean can you see me going from here to a job with my issues....

Were you able to follow up your referral, and was it helpful to you? What has happened about employment and training?

Of the 71 positive responses to referral, 51 reported that there had been some follow up, but unfortunately it was impossible to identify if the IAG provider or another housing contact was the source. This suggests that IAG provider responses may be higher than the database indicates, and the potential for more positive outcomes is higher than the current level.

Some responses give a picture of the range of conversations –

I got a call and then they phoned back, and sounded friendly, its just a bit too much for me now, it will be something for me to do

I talked to an advisor on the phone, and when I went back to (council officer) I asked about what if they work together and will it affect my application, and she says it is not about housing it is up to me, and I think I will do something now....

I think it is a start isn't it...I will use this and see if it will be something or nothing

Thinking about your temporary accommodation, are there problems taking up training and employment? What makes training and employment more difficult to achieve?

Of the 71 positive responses to HELP referral 50 (70%) said the temporary accommodation was an obstacle to training and employment. Of the 31 negative responses to referral only 12 (40%) said that temporary accommodation was a barrier. This seems to support evidence from the database and focus group that the refusers are more likely to be on incapacity benefit or have young children and have a more negative long-term view of their employability.

There were some very strong findings in other ways –

- Respondents in temporary accommodation out of their borough (15) all reported this was a major obstacle
- Childcare was a major barrier for all households with children
- Temporary accommodation costs were a major problem for 66 of the 71 positive referrals, although 26 of these believed housing cost was not an obstacle to training

- Living in temporary accommodation is too difficult to allow employment or training in the view of 22 respondents, including 12 of those outside their area.

Some responses give a picture of the range of conversations –

It is £300 a week...no.. more..its over £300 a week, until I have a sensible rent that's it isn't it....I can do courses, that will do it, get moved on and finish a course...

The place is squalid...we cant stay in it never mind live in it....disgusting stuff everyday...I get out every morning and stay out....no one can count on anything in this place.....

I am an hour from (home borough) I wont get on a course from here....I might stay here, you know if a place came up, but I was told there's no chance so I am just waiting

Section Four

Feedback from IAG and Housing Providers

HELP aims to create change in mainstream services that increase the inclusion of homeless households. As part of our impact assessment we contacted managers of a range of services to elicit their views and impressions of the effectiveness of the HELP pilot.

A short questionnaire was completed with IAG providers, and with Housing Services managers.

Main findings – IAG providers

All the IAG providers felt that the referrals from the housing teams were appropriate for the service. This is probably reflected in the fact that they all reported staff had participated in training which appears to have been effective.

All the IAG providers reported that they use the database. Some have struggled with this, particularly in the early stages, but most appeared to think that use of the database is now progressing well. This correlates with the feedback from housing staff who reported a lack of engagement from IAG staff initially but reported this had improved significantly.

IAG providers all stated that they use the database for internal analysis and reporting. Again, some problems were reported initially but they felt these had been overcome.

In terms of improvements needed to assist with better joint working, the following points were noted:

- Several felt that reporting had to improve
- Meetings should focus more on sharing good practice
- Housing staff had little knowledge of service from IAG providers – while this has improved significantly, this would need to be maintained over time

It should be noted that IAG providers' responses painted a more positive picture than the responses we generally received from housing staff. There appears to be some miscommunication around how well the IAG is working and this needs to be improved to ensure that all parties in the project are equally aware of the weaknesses and what needs to improve to enable them to work together to provide the best possible service to clients.

Main findings – housing managers

There was clear consensus across the housing managers about what they hoped to gain from the HELP project. They focused on two main areas:

- Enhanced service options (to increase social mobility)
- Raising of the employment agenda with clients (to reduce dependency)

However, few felt this had been fully achieved. Most agreed the options were now there, but it was “early days” to truly say that the aims had been met; at this interim stage, this is not wholly surprising. Two councils also reported large scale internal organisational change or staff shortages as having significantly affected local progress.

In terms of strengths of the service from the perspective of housing managers, the following issues were identified:

- Good local relationships with some IAG providers
- Quick and easy referral mechanisms
- Enthusiasm of the HELP officers
- Sharing of good practice
- Improved local provision

In terms of weaknesses, the following issues were identified:

- Better feedback needed from referrals (especially to maintain “buy-in” from housing staff)
- The perception that this would impact marginally on staff time was felt to be wrong; the “enhanced” interviews inevitably take more time
- The “benefit trap” was recognised as being a big issue for many tenants
- Database problems
- Co-ordination of the IAG offer could be improved (especially where IAG is offered by more than one provider in a borough)
- The need for clearer evidence of the benefits of training and employment and that tenants would be better off through taking this route

When asked about how far the project had impacted on the “mainstream” there was a clear sense that the employment agenda had been raised amongst housing staff. Initial hostility had been overcome and there was a real sense of change amongst many housing staff – although some teams had some way to go in terms of making changes.

Some managers also reported a better co-ordination of services and information across internal council departments.

One manager was fairly negative about this issue, but mostly because the council has been undergoing a significant restructuring which had impacted on the ability of the project to make headway.

In terms of additional support needed most managers wanted more and better reporting back of referrals as a way of helping staff maintain interest and enthusiasm for the project. One manager also felt that supporting better “buy in” from management and team leaders would assist in encouraging front line staff to make changes

Managers were also concerned about the need for more local resources once the project ends, they felt that the need for a local champion was particularly important.

Some managers felt the database needed improving.

Overall, managers were positive about the performance of the partnership group with an excellence rating of 69%.

Conclusion

There is enthusiasm from both IAG providers and managers of housing teams with some clear sense of progress after an initial slow start in some areas. While some areas of change needed may be beyond the scope of the project (e.g. issues around housing benefits and large scale organisational change), some suggestions for improvements are:

- Clearer and more consistent communications between front line staff and IAG providers
- Further development/enhancement of the data base
- Access to “better off” calculations for IAG providers
- Development of case study material to show how much better off successful clients have been

Section Five

Assessment of the sustainability and robustness of HELP

When HELP was launched it had a principal aim of creating a sustainable referral system as part of the day to day operation of the Homelessness Services. In order to assess the likelihood that this is being achieved we have reviewed virtually all internal reports and plans for the last two years' work.

There are nine criteria most commonly used to judge the robustness and sustainability of a partnership, and we have considered these in relation to the systems created by HELP -

The Partnership Performance Indicator

1. Constitution

The partnership has a written declaration of purpose which outlines terms of reference, representational structures, membership rules and main accountabilities.

The HELP Board has met regularly since winning support for the project, has a clear remit based on the project proposal, clear accountabilities, and demonstrates this regularly with open reviews of progress and problems, and the operation of the service.

2. Appropriate representation

The partnership has effective representation that is fit for the stated purpose. This can be through direct membership or through using other methods for stakeholder influence.

The HELP Board is well attended by senior officers across the boroughs. There is evidence of need for regular local oversight of the operation, and local steering groups are now being created.

3. Conflicts of interest

The partnership has effective procedures for dealing with conflicts of interest and inter-member competition.

We found no evidence of conflicts of interest.

4. Protocols and accountability

The partnership actively manages its relationships with key stakeholders and should have agreed protocols with linked agencies / organisations which demonstrate effective accountability for its actions.

Progress has been uneven in this area – some authorities have developed procedures and protocols more rapidly than others, but this is being addressed through discussion at the board and actions from HELP and its partners.

5. Effective roles

The partnership demonstrates a clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities within itself (formally structuring these where appropriate) and with paid officers.

The role of the HELP staff was clearly communicated, and large scale briefings and training events have been maintained throughout the life of the project.

Problems have arisen, and HELP has adapted roles. For example the project relied on the co-operation of IAG Providers, and did not initially anticipate the difficulties in securing this and the required feedback. More resources and priority from the HELP staff and local authority staff is now being deployed.

There is evidence of some inconsistency across the sub-region that may reduce effectiveness and can cause frustration for staff. This is being addressed through the new local steering groups and SLAs.

6. Communication

The partnership communicates well within itself and externally using a range of appropriate media.

The Board is well supported and informed, and initial information and briefings were extensive.

The staff in local authorities are now requesting more information for the project – such as specialist briefing, more feedback, and more publicity. This is a natural result of the project developing, and will require priority in the next few months.

7. Effectiveness of meetings

All partnership meetings are well planned, effectively chaired and allow appropriate time and balance for assessment of situations, planning, action and review.

The Board appears to be well organised, provides clear direction, and is well attended.

8. Shared values and culture

The partnership demonstrates a clear set of shared values that are recognisable through a range of demonstrable actions.

The Board has a clear shared purpose and values as evidenced by the clarity of the project role and subsequent management.

The staff in local authorities are enthusiastic about the purpose of the project and showed a strong sense of shared values of choice, and empowerment, in this research.

9. Performance management

The partnership effectively manages its own performance against stated aims, objectives and targets and plans for the future based on this review.

The partnership has focused on performance consistently, and made this a central part of its work.

For example, the project has faced several challenges since its inception, and has responded to each one with openness and clear plans. The project was ambitious compared to other experience of W2W because it chose to intervene in the midst of personal crisis in the lives of the clients. This produced some unanticipated problems with the speed at which boroughs developed, the buy in of different IAG providers, etc.

Strategic relevance

In addition to the above, the project impacts significantly on overall strategies in the area. The HELP project addresses many of the objectives within West London Working, a partnership between the local authorities, London Development Agency, Learning and Skills Council and Job Centre Plus.

HELP aims to directly address the main objectives of the West London Working partnership by -

- reducing benefits claimants count and maintain employment
- increasing households in work
- increasing income in households with children

The London Development Agency is developing new responses to the current recession, and has appointed a new lead officer who has highlighted two main elements for the strategy that seem to reinforce the relevance of HELP in the changing policy –

- Targeting hard to reach workless households at risk of long-term unemployment
- Rewarding public sector agencies that embrace strategies to reduce worklessness

The HELP methodology has also been replicated in the development of other projects (i.e. West London Working's Outreach and Guidance Project, and New Pathways to Work in West London . This demonstrates good strategic linkages.

Conclusion

The HELP project has developed a strong partnership agreement and is establishing local working arrangements through formal service agreements, with oversight from the steering body, and support from senior officers.

The strategic relevance of HELP may be increasing in significance in the recession as the partnership targets hard to reach households, and has a demonstrable track record for achievement, and partnership of agencies that have committed to adding increased employment to their already complex and pressurised services.

One point to note with regard to replication is that other partnerships should take note of the fact that there is likely to be a resource issue in encouraging staff from other agencies to talk with their clients about employment and training due to the inevitable extension of interviews to provide a more enhanced service.

Section Six

Conclusion and recommendations

The HELP project has successfully established referral systems across the sub region. The project is enthusiastically supported by key staff, and is welcomed by clients.

The next few months are an opportunity to consolidate the systems and ensure the long-term durability of HELP.

The research has shown that the systems have developed unevenly across the sub region, and there is evidence that some boroughs have been more effectively engaged than others in delivering referrals; this issue is now being addressed through the HELP team, local staff, and local steering groups.

The relationships with the IAG providers have been problematic, and the lack of information on client progress has inhibited this evaluation, and has been a cause of frustration for staff.

Information and promotional material needs more frequent review and circulation, and feedback to participating staff will encourage their efforts and their colleagues.

There is some evidence that some more targeting of clients and specialist information or referrals would help some clients, although we were unable to examine this fully in this study.

Recommendations

Local Performance Management

- Complete the creation of steering groups in each borough, and ensure a clear brief with senior management support and attendance locally.
- Development and enhancement of the database to ensure this is used effectively and can provide the necessary performance reports.

IAG Providers

- The Project needs to develop a consistent approach to engaging with Providers, and consider how further improvements can be made. This includes a more consistent approach to communication between housing and IAG staff.
- The IAG providers are generally paid for outcomes and HELP referrals are not necessarily a high priority – HELP needs to consider

how referrals can be included in the current systems, or suggest amendment to current arrangements.

- The new policy statements by the London Development Agency point to increased high level support for the type of innovation represented by HELP – discussing the emerging agenda with IAG providers can reinforce the importance of committing to HELP for future relationships in the capital. More than this IAG providers should be able to see that future new funding may be available to those organisations who show a strong commitment to this partnership.
- The local steering groups will be crucial to delivering improvement here, and so this needs to be a high priority.

Review information available for staff and clients

- HELP staff and clients will benefit from more feedback, more information on what is available, and more updates, this includes the development of some “better off” case studies for housing and IAG staff

Incentives for clients

- The partnership should consider the feasibility of introducing incentives for participating clients such as –
 - More re-housing points
 - Priority for temporary accommodation nearer the home borough
 - Offers of work experience
- Although not an incentive as such, clients do need to be convinced that they will be better off by undertaking training and entering employment. The project should look to develop a methodology to ensure that high quality, “better off” calculations are available at key points in the process.

Final conclusion

The report laid out three broad questions to address, and it is possible to make a short observation in respect of each

Has the HELP project provided value for money?

The real value of the project will become clear in the next 6-12 months – if the systems are robust and can be mainstreamed, it will provide extremely good value for money

How effectively does it engage with homeless households?

Homeless households were very positive about HELP, and staff delivering the service were enthusiastically committed to it.

Has it established durable systems that will continue after the first two years?

HELP has learned as it has developed – changing culture in highly pressurised systems like homeless assessment and services is a demanding challenge. The evidence shows that robust systems with good partnership principles are now in place.