

MAXIMISING THE BENEFIT OF

the local authority Hubs approach

BEST PRACTICE CHECKLIST

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Maximising the benefit of the local authority Hubs approach – Best Practice checklist

In autumn 2010, five regional local authority-led 'Hubs' were established. The Hubs brought together neighbouring local authorities, with the aim of promoting knowledge sharing and learning across different local authorities around housing options and the prevention of homelessness. This model was intended to help local authorities in their attempts to meet the 2012 homelessness target. In 2003 the Scottish Parliament passed legislation outlining the provisions for a right to housing for unintentionally homeless households by 2012. This removes the requirement that, to be able to access settled accommodation, presenting households had to exhibit priority need.

In March 2011, the Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos MORI Scotland and Mandy Littlewood Social Research and Consulting to carry out an evaluation of the approach. The evaluation is able to offer some insights into how the Hubs model could be best designed.

What are Hubs?

Hubs are groups of local authorities who meet regularly to promote, develop and share information and best practice around a specific service area. While the Hubs approach is new and has, so far, only been used in to help promote and share best practice around housing options services, there may be value in using the model in other service areas. The key aims of the Hubs approach are to:

- **help create 'buy in' to a new way of delivering a service** – through dissemination of evidence on the efficacy of the service and allowing local authorities to observe first-hand how these services are being delivered in other local authorities (for example, job-shadowing)
- **help local authorities to develop their services** – for example, for local authorities who are in the process of developing the service to learn from the experiences of local authorities who have already implemented the service
- **promote joint working between local authorities to develop good practice around the service** – for example, through joint commissioning of research and training activities.

Hubs are local authority-led but membership can be extended to include non-local authority organisations (for example, third sector agencies, Registered Social Landlords etc.) who will work in partnership with local authorities to deliver the services.

Wider applicability of Hubs

Being part of a Hub can benefit a local authority in a number of ways, including: helping to build confidence in and create 'buy in' to a new approach to service delivery; providing reassurance on progress towards developing services; and learning through sharing best practice and carrying out joint projects. As a result, there may be value in using the model in other service areas outwith homelessness prevention.

For the approach to be most effective and valid, it should be applied to a service area where there are particular challenges being faced by local authorities, including:

- the need to implement a new service or policy within a certain time period, or in order to meet a specified target
- differential levels of 'buy in' to, and implementation of, a new service or policy initiative across local authorities.

Best practice checklist

The following measures should be taken to ensure maximum benefit is derived from the Hubs approach.

During the set up of Hubs:

- ✓ **Organisers (e.g. the Scottish Government) and Hub members (e.g. local authorities) should agree general principles at the outset of Hubs around the aims of the process and what Hubs are being set up to achieve** – in the absence of a clear understanding of what Hubs have been set up to achieve Hubs will take longer to ‘find their feet’
- ✓ **Organisers should host events/seminars with Hub members to launch the Hubs approach** – these events help to increase ‘buy in’ to the approach, by signalling the organiser’s endorsement of the Hubs approach and related new service or policy initiative, and provide an opportunity to communicate the aims of the approach to Hub members
- ✓ **Organisers and Hub members should ensure that each Hub is made up of members at different stages in the development of services** – through the Hub, local authorities with less well developed approaches will be able to learn from the experience of those who have already developed services. This might include visits to more advanced local authorities to see firsthand how the approach is working
- ✓ **Organisers and Hub members should set up formal mechanisms to share information between Hubs** – this will help to increase the pool of best practice available to local authorities.
- ✓ **Organisers should ask for volunteer ‘lead’ Hub members that are committed to the work of their Hub** – they need to be willing to commit time to oversee the development of their Hub. This will ensure the continuity of their Hub

Once the Hubs have been set up:

- ✓ **Hub members should schedule regular and frequent meetings** – meeting regularly and often will help Hubs to develop more quickly and ensure the continuity of Hub activities
- ✓ **Hub members should have more regular meetings in the initial development of the Hub** – this will allow sufficient time for Hubs to ‘find their feet’: for members to get to know each other better, develop trust, learn about each others’ existing approaches; and develop clear aims for the Hub
- ✓ **Organisers should make funding available to Hub members to carry out joint project work only after Hubs have had time to develop clear aims** – this will help to ensure Hubs make more informed decisions about how to spend the money most effectively. While funding is important as an incentive for local authorities to join the Hub, making funding available too early in the Hub’s development can be a distraction for Hub members, with initial meetings being focused on how to spend the available funding rather than on sharing what best practice is already known within the group
- ✓ **Hub members should recruit administrative support** – administrative tasks are a very big commitment so some form of administrative support will ensure that the representative from the ‘lead’ authority is not overburdened with Hub-related tasks

This document, along with full research report and key research findings of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch. If you have any further queries about social research, or would like further copies of this research findings summary document or the full research report, please contact us at socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or on **0131-244 7560**.