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Evaluation of the Local Authority Housing Hubs Approach

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EVALUATION OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING HUBS APPROACH

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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1 Introduction	7
<i>The policy background</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>The 2012 Target.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Refocusing services towards prevention.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Housing Hubs.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Progress towards the 2012 target.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Future developments on measuring prevention</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Aims and objectives.....</i>	<i>12</i>
2 Methods	14
<i>Scoping interviews with Hub leads</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Focus groups and depth interviews with local authority representatives</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Depth interviews with local authority Heads of Service</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Monitoring of the Communities of Practice website.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Secondary data analysis.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Data scoping</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Analysis of qualitative data</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Limitations of the evaluation and interpretation of findings.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Structure of the report.....</i>	<i>17</i>
3 Overview of the Hubs.....	18
<i>How was each Hub comprised?</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>How did the Hub approach differ from other joint working activities?</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>How were meetings organised?.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>How often did Hubs meet?</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>How did Hubs spend the 'enabling' funding?</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>How did Hubs communicate?</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>To what extent did Hubs use the communities of practice website?</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Approaches to monitoring homelessness prevention.....</i>	<i>25</i>
4 What benefits have the Hubs achieved?	28
<i>Encouraging a culture change among local authorities.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Increasing 'buy in' to the housing options approach.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Raising the profile of housing options</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Legitimising and building confidence in the housing options</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Helping local authorities to develop the housing options approach.....</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Sharing of information and best practice.....</i>	<i>32</i>

<i>Hub projects</i>	34
5 Key success factors and barriers	37
<i>Early development of the Hubs</i>	37
<i>Barriers to developing clear aims for the Hub</i>	38
<i>Membership of Hubs</i>	41
<i>Hubs of local authorities at different stages in the development of housing options</i>	41
<i>The 'lead' local authority being committed to the Hub</i>	42
<i>The inner workings of the Hub</i>	43
<i>Trust, openness and honesty</i>	43
<i>Having regular and frequent meetings</i>	43
<i>Having administrative support</i>	45
<i>Having committed members</i>	46
6 The likelihood of Hubs continuing	47
<i>Developing the current Hubs</i>	47
<i>Factors which may impact on Hubs continuing</i>	49
7 Replicating the Hubs model in other service areas	51
<i>Wider applicability of Hubs</i>	51
<i>Best practice guidance</i>	52
Annex A: Scoping interviews with Hub 'leads' – topic guide	54
Annex B: Focus groups with Hub members – topic guide	58
Annex C: telephone interviews with Hub members – topic guide	63
Annex D: telephone interviews with Heads of service – topic guide	69
Annex E: Telephone interviews with Local authority data representatives – topic guide	
73	
Annex F: Draft homelessness prevention pro-forma	75

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The policy background

- 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 June 2010 the Scottish Government/COSLA 2012 Joint Steering group identified the adoption of homelessness prevention work, and in particular the housing options approach, as a key way to help local authorities meet the 2012 homelessness target.
- Housing Options approach refocuses the way local authorities deal with housing problems, from assessing clients on the basis of what they are legally entitled to receive, towards an approach based on finding the most helpful solution for the client in light of their circumstances: the focus moves from “who can we help?” to “how can we help?”
- To help to encourage local authorities to move towards a housing options approach, the Scottish Government launched the Scottish Housing Options Funding Programme which outlined plans to provide approximately £500,000 of 'enabling funding' over a 14 month period from June 2010, to help local authorities make the changes required to adopt housing options.
- Five regional 'Hubs' were established in autumn 2010, which brought together groups of neighbouring local authorities, with the aim of promoting knowledge sharing and learning across different local authorities in relation to housing options.

Aims and Methods

- This report presents findings from the evaluation of the local authority housing Hubs approach (referred to as 'Hubs'). The evaluation had two objectives:
 - to explore how well these arrangements are working to prevent homelessness and deliver the 2012 homelessness target, and
 - to identify and examine what has been working well in order to develop, promote and share good practice.
- The evaluation was conducted primarily through qualitative research with all Hub members and a sample of local authority Heads of Service. The evaluation also comprised analysis of the type of contact Hubs had through the Communities of Practice website (a tool set up to encourage the sharing of information across Hubs), and secondary data analysis of national Homelessness data.

Overview of the Hubs

- Five regional Hubs were created across Scotland. Hubs are grouped broadly by geography, bringing together neighbouring local authorities.
- Each Hub had a 'lead' (or 'host') authority which was the main contact for the Hub and was responsible for hosting meetings and co-ordinating the activities of the Hub.
- In addition to local authority members, at the time of fieldwork, three Hubs had invited external organisations (Registered Social Landlords and third sector agencies) to become part of their Hub.
- Two of the Hubs had commissioned external organisations to assist with the administration of Hub activities, while one utilised internal administration support to assist with Hub-related tasks. The remaining two 'leads' carried out tasks without any specific administration support.
- Hubs made efforts to meet on a regular basis but some did so more frequently than others: one met monthly, three met every six weeks and one met quarterly. As a result, there was huge variation in the number of meetings held across the five Hubs.
- To be eligible for enabling funding, each Hub was required to submit an action plan which outlined a number of desired outcomes for the Hub, the proposed action to achieve each outcome, and associated estimated timescales and levels of funding required to deliver each.
- Overall, 71% of the funding that was originally awarded to Hubs was spent.

What benefits have Hubs achieved?

- There was evidence to suggest that the Hubs benefited local authorities in two ways:
 - increasing '*buy in*' to the housing options approach and the prevention of homelessness particularly among local authorities who had not yet developed, or were in the early stages of developing, their housing options approaches by helping to: *raise the profile of housing options*; and *legitimise and build confidence in the approach*.
 - assisting local authorities in the *development of housing options approaches* through *Hub-related projects* (paid for by the available enabling funding) and through the *sharing of best practice* – including: learning from more advanced local authorities about what worked well when they were developing their housing options approach; sharing experiences of engaging with RSLs and private landlords; and taking staff on visits to other local authorities to observe the activities of frontline staff who were delivering the approach on a daily basis.

Key success factors

- A number of factors were identified as having an influence on the success of Hub working.

Early development of Hubs

Spending sufficient time in the early stages to develop clear aims for the Hub

- Hub members who felt that they had received most benefit from the process were part of Hubs who had met most often in the early stages. Making time to meet in the early stages was central to Hubs getting off the ground and developing clear aims for the Hub.

Membership of Hubs

Hubs consisting of local authorities at different stages in the development of housing options

- It was important to the success of Hubs that they were comprised of local authorities at different stages in developing housing options approaches. This ensured that Hub members could share best practice and experiences, and learn from members who were further ahead in the development of housing options.

The 'lead' local authority being able to make time to carry out Hub activities

- Evidence from Hubs suggested that the suitability and effectiveness of the 'lead' was reliant on them being fully committed to the process and making appropriate resources available to carry out Hub-related administrative tasks (in addition to their 'day job'). 'Leads' played an important role in scheduling meetings, facilitating communication between members and ensuring the continuity of Hub activities.

The inner workings of the Hub

Trust, openness and honesty among members

- Trust encouraged members to be open and honest with each other about their local *authority's progress and their* concerns surrounding housing options – to “lay their cards on the table”. This helped to facilitate the setting of clear aims for the Hub and was the foundation for sharing information and best practice.

Having regular and frequent meetings

- It was central to the success of the approach that Hubs met frequently, particularly in the early stages. This ensured continuity of Hub activities.

Having administrative support

- Administrative support was perceived to be essential to alleviate the workload of the 'lead' and ensure the continuity of the Hub. Lack of administrative support was identified as a significant barrier to the successful running of the Hub process.

Having committed members

- The success of the Hub was reliant upon all members of the Hub being committed to the process by making efforts to attend Hub meetings and sharing the responsibility of carrying out action plan-related tasks. This way of *working helped to share responsibility* across members and ensure the continuity of Hub activities. Further, it ensured that the process was not over-reliant on the 'lead' local authority.

Likelihood of Hubs Continuing

- There was a great deal of appetite among Hub members to continue beyond 31st March 2012. There was a feeling that much of the work of Hubs still had to be completed.
- Hubs are likely to continue in some form, at least in the short term, beyond 31st March 2012. Hub members identified two ways that the process could be developed to provide greater benefits for members:
 - engaging external organisations in the Hubs process - while three Hubs had invited other external organisations, all Hubs had ambitions to extend the membership of their Hub (to include RSLs, private landlords and third sector agencies). The Hub was seen as a potential platform in which to involve external organisations in the homelessness prevention agenda
 - increasing sharing between Hubs - while the Scottish Government made efforts to facilitate sharing between Hubs, by creating the Communities of Practice website, the website was not widely used. Hub members were keen for more regular and active sharing of information and experiences across Hubs.

Factors which may impact on Hubs continuing

- It was evident that two issues would need to be addressed for this to be considered. These were:
 - *the availability of funding* – without funding, members of one Hub did not believe they would be able to pay for travel from their own local authority's budget; since some form of administrative support was seen as being very helpful, members felt that it was important to make some funding available for this purpose; some felt that it was important for the Scottish Government to make some money available to fund Hub based ideas and activities.

- *Hubs maintaining a clear purpose* - some Hub members had doubts as to whether there would be reason to continue in the longer term, when all the desired outcomes of the Hub and the 2012 Target had been met. Therefore, if Hubs are going to continue, their purpose and aims would need to be restated. This may include their importance to the ongoing development of the housing options approach in all Scottish local authorities

Replicating the Hubs Model in other service areas

- Hub members and Heads of Service felt that there could be value in rolling out the Hub approach, either to areas related to housing or in other service areas. However, while they felt that many of these individual principles could be used in any service area, for the Hubs model itself to be valid and effective, it would need to be applied to an area where the challenges faced by local authorities are similar to those which prompted the development of the Hubs.

Best practice guidance

- The evaluation is able to offer some insights into how the Hubs model could be best designed. The following measures should be taken to ensure maximum benefit is derived from the Hubs model:
- During the setup 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*
 - *Organisers should host events/seminars with Hub members to launch the Hubs approach*
 - *Organisers and Hub members should ensure that each Hub is made up of members at different stages in the development of services*
 - *Organisers and Hub members should set up formal mechanisms to share information between Hubs*
 - *Organisers should ask for volunteer 'lead' Hub members that are committed to the work of their Hub*
- Once the Hubs have been set up:
 - *Hub members should schedule regular and frequent meetings*
 - *Hub members should have more regular meetings in the initial development of 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*

- *Hub members should recruit administrative support.*

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report presents findings from the evaluation of the local authority housing Hubs approach (referred to as 'Hubs'). The evaluation was carried out by Ipsos MORI Scotland and Mandy Littlewood Social Research and Consulting on behalf of the Scottish Government.
- 1.2 This opening chapter sets out the policy background and context of the research, before detailing the aims and objectives of the evaluation.

The policy background

The 2012 Target

- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 Currently, a homelessness assessment involves a series of four tests, one of which assesses whether households are in 'priority need'. Priority need is influenced by a number of factors, including whether the household contains a pregnant person, children, a vulnerable person (with one of a number of health issues), is a person aged 16-17 years and those at risk of violence or exploitation. It also involves questions aimed at establishing whether their actions may have led to their homelessness (through non-payment of rent, for example) and if the local authority can make a referral to another authority if the household has no local connection with that authority.
- 1.5 The removal of the priority need requirement means that local authorities will have a duty to provide settled accommodation to all unintentionally homeless households.

Refocusing services towards prevention

- 1.6 In June 2010 the Scottish Government/COSLA held a seminar which identified the adoption of homelessness prevention work, and in particular the housing options approach, as a key way to help local authorities meet the 2012 homelessness target.
- 1.7 The housing options approach refocuses the way local authorities deal with housing problems, from assessing clients on the basis of what they are legally entitled to receive, towards an approach based on finding the most helpful solution for the client in light of their circumstances: the focus moves from "who can we help?" to "how can we help?"
- 1.8 Housing options interviews aim to establish a picture of the client's current circumstances and future housing aspirations, including their: living arrangements, financial situation, available social networks and any support needs (for example, any health issues, or drug or alcohol problems). Using this information, local authorities can offer suitable options to best meet the housing needs of the client. These include: potential home ownership,

private rented accommodation, or making arrangements to help the client stay in their current accommodation; for example by providing benefits advice or mediation services. Housing options sits alongside the homelessness legislation and should not be seen as an alternative to a household's legal rights.

Housing Hubs

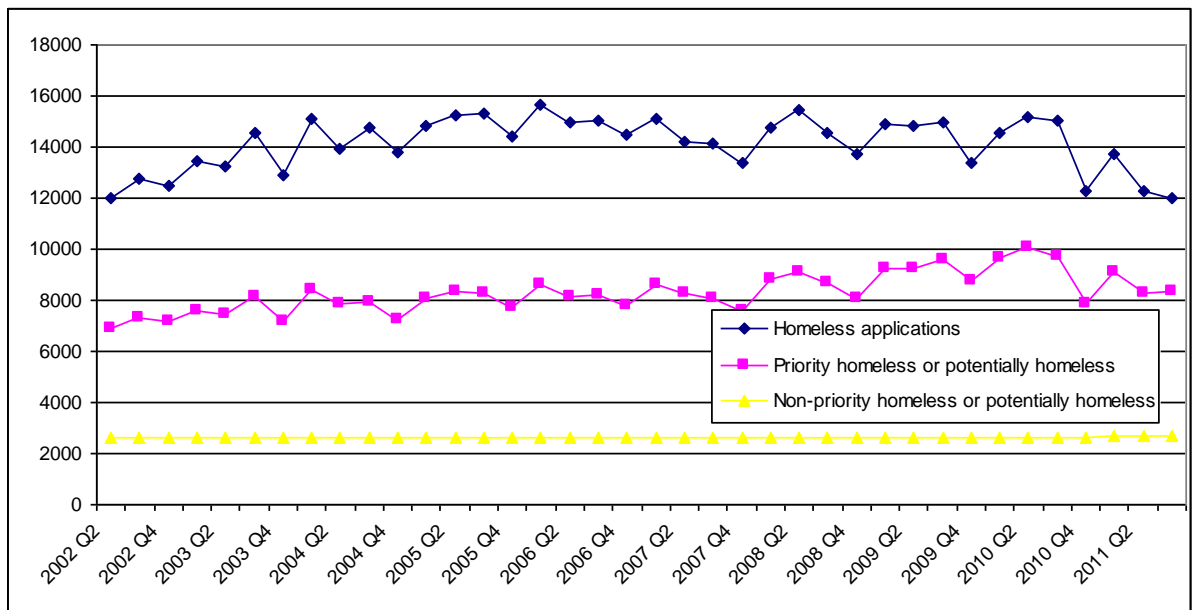
- 1.9 While housing options has been adopted in England, and has been found to be a successful way of addressing homelessness, the adoption of the approach in Scotland was far less widespread. While some local authorities had developed housing option approaches (and have been delivering services for some time), other local authorities were at earlier stages in their development.
- 1.10 To help to encourage local authorities to move towards a housing options approach, the Scottish Government/COSLA 2012 Joint Steering Group held a seminar on homelessness prevention on 15 June 2010. This focused on prevention activity, and in particular promoting how adopting a housing options approach could better help local authorities prevent homelessness and meet the 2012 target.
- 1.11 At this event, the Scottish Government launched the Scottish Housing Options Funding Programme which outlined plans to provide approximately £500,000 of 'enabling funding' over a 14 month period from June 2010, to help local authorities make the changes required to adopt the housing options approach. The Housing Options Funding programme aimed to encourage and assist local authorities in the development of housing options, through partnership working.
- 1.12 Following the Scottish Government/COSLA 2012 Joint Steering Group seminar on the 15 June 2010, the Scottish Government invited local authorities that were interested in obtaining some of the available 'enabling funding' to submit an 'expression of interest'. As part of this, local authorities were asked to provide information about:
 - any local authorities they were currently working in partnership with, or would envisage working with, in the delivery of their housing options service
 - any external organisations (for example, private landlords, Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and third sector organisations) they were currently working in partnership with, or would envisage working with, in the delivery of their housing options service
 - their current approach to homelessness prevention and any aspects that they had found to be particularly successful
 - whether or not they would be interested in becoming a 'mentor' to other neighbouring local authorities.

- 1.13 Following this process, five regional ‘Hubs’ were established in autumn 2010, which brought together neighbouring local authorities, with the aim of promoting knowledge sharing and learning across different local authorities. The consensus among local authorities was to group Hubs broadly by geography.
- 1.14 When Hubs were established, they were comprised as follows:
- *Ayrshire & South* - North Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway, East Ayrshire, Inverclyde and South Ayrshire
 - *Edinburgh, Lothians & Borders* - City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Falkirk, Midlothian, Scottish Borders and West Lothian.
 - *North & Islands* - Highland, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Eilean Siar, Moray, Orkney Islands, and Shetland Islands
 - *Tayside, Fife & Central* - Perth & Kinross, Angus, Argyll & Bute, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City and Fife
 - *West* - East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, Stirling and West Dunbartonshire.
- 1.15 Local authorities volunteered to be a ‘lead’ or ‘host’ authority for each Hub which would be responsible for hosting meetings and co-ordinating the activities of their Hub.
- 1.16 To launch the Hubs, a series of five regional seminars were held with members of each Hub in August and September 2010. At these meetings, a number of presentations were given:
- the Scottish Government set out the national policy context around homelessness prevention
 - the ‘lead’ local authority within each Hub outlined their current approach to homelessness prevention
 - a local Registered Social Landlord (RSL) in each region discussed their approach to tenancy sustainment.
- 1.17 In addition, in conjunction with Communities of Practice for Public Service, and the Housing Management and Efficiencies Learning Network, a dedicated web community was set up to allow a sharing of information and ideas both within and between the Hubs.
- 1.18 At the outset of the Hubs, the Scottish Housing Best Value Network (SHBVN) approached the Scottish Government to offer their services in relation to providing administrative support to all the Hubs. Not all Hubs chose to use the services of the SHBVN (see Chapter 3 for more information).

Progress towards the 2012 target

- 1.19 Total homeless applicant numbers had been steadily increasing over the past couple of decades from around 40,000 a year to nearer 60,000, peaking at almost 61,000 in 2005-06. Recent progress has been more positive. By 2010-2011, the number of applicants had fallen to just over 55,000 and the most recent data has shown a marked reduction in applications, with a 20% reduction in Quarter 3 of 2011 compared with the same period in 2010 (see Figure 1.1).
- 1.20 Figure 1.1 also shows a narrowing of the gap between the total number assessed as homeless and the number assessed as in priority need. This is what we would expect to see as we approach 2012. Essentially, the closer local authorities are to assessing 100% of applicants as in priority need, the less of an impact the 2012 removal of priority need will have.

Figure 1.1: Quarterly trends in application numbers and the number assessed as homeless and in priority need (Q2 2002 to Q3 2011)



Source: Quarterly Homelessness statistics, February 2012 (Table 1 – total applications, Table 5 – homeless or potentially homeless and homeless/potentially homeless in priority need)

- 1.21 However, there is a good deal of variation in the progress towards the abolition of priority need across local authorities. Table 1.1 shows a summary measure of the most recent change from 2008-09 to Quarters 2 and 3 of 2011. Local authorities are getting closer to assessing 90% of applicants as in priority need, with an average (mean) of 87.8% assessed as in priority need in 2011. The local authorities with above average rates of priority need are now approaching 97% while those below average are at over 85%. This shows that the removal of priority need is within reach for many but will be problematic for some.

Table 1.1: Average spread of homeless applicants assessed as in priority need (%)

	%assessed as priority need Quarter 3 2011	%assessed as priority need Quarter 2 2011	% assessed as priority need 10/11	% assessed as priority need 09/10	%assessed as priority need 08/09
Average (mean)	91.2	90.6	87.8	84.6	81.6
Below average	89.3	87.3	85.0	82.1	78.9
Above average	96.7	96.7	91.1	88.2	85.6

Source: HL1, Annual Homelessness Reference Tables 2008-09, 2009-10, 2010/11
Table 27, Quarterly Reference Tables Q2, Q3 2011 (Table13)

1.22 The local authorities corresponding to the three segments of the below average, average and above average levels of priority need in Quarter 3 2011 are as follows (Hub initials in brackets):

- **Below average % PN:** Aberdeen City (NI), Aberdeenshire (NI), East Ayrshire (AS), East Dunbartonshire (W), East Lothian (ELB), Edinburgh (ELB), Eilean Siar (NI), Fife (TFC), Highland (NI), North Lanarkshire (W) and West Lothian (ELB).
- **Average % PN:** Argyll & Bute (TFC), Clackmannanshire (TFC), Dumfries & Galloway (AS), Falkirk (ELB), Glasgow City (W), Midlothian (ELB), Perth & Kinross (TFC), Shetland (NI), South Ayrshire (AS) and South Lanarkshire (W).
- **Above average % PN:** Angus (TFC), Dundee City (TFC), East Renfrewshire (W), Inverclyde (W), Moray (NI), North Ayrshire (AS), Orkney (NI), Renfrewshire (W), Scottish Borders (ELB), Stirling and West Dunbartonshire (W).

1.23 Local authorities with different levels of priority need assessment are spread between the five Hub areas. However, the local authorities in the North and Islands and Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders are more clustered in the 'below average' priority need group. Those in the West Hub are a little more clustered in the 'above average' group while Ayrshire and South and Tayside, Fife and Central are more clustered in the middle range.

1.24 Although the general direction of change is for a greater proportion of applicants to be assessed as in priority need, around a third of local authorities showed a reduction in the proportion of their applicants assessed as priority need in the recent quarter.

Future developments on measuring prevention

1.25 While data collected as part of HL1¹ and Section 11 notifications² can provide an indication of the range of prevention activities that local

¹ HL1 collects information about advice and assistance provided to people who are assessed as threatened with homelessness or not homeless, a sub-set of all applicants. This provides some evidence of the broad range of activities being undertaken but does not cover households for whom

authorities are engaged in and their effects, current indicators are not able to measure prevention work in its entirety.

- 1.26 A recent development to tackle the lack of data on prevention was a consultation on possible approaches to monitoring prevention activity among non-homeless applicants. The draft pro-forma which was under consultation is included in Annex F. The form collects data on prevention activity at the local authority rather than the case level (so more similar to HL2 than HL1 in that respect). Activities are separated under the heading of 'able to stay in existing home' and 'assisted to obtain alternative accommodation' as collected by DCLG in England³. The prevention pro forma was discussed at the Homelessness Statistics User Group on 18th April 2012. The Scottish Government are considering a two stage approach. First, agreeing the core questions which local authorities could collect information on. Second, discussing with local authorities if and how local authorities can provide the data.

Aims and objectives

- 1.27 It is within this context that the Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct an evaluation of the Homelessness Hub network. This was primarily a process evaluation, focusing on the operational effectiveness of the Hubs. However, while it could not provide any impact assessment, given the timing and short duration of the research, it does report on the immediate benefits of the Hubs to local authorities. The evaluation had two objectives:

- to explore how well these arrangements are working to prevent homelessness and deliver the 2012 homelessness target, and;
- to identify and examine what has been working well in order to develop, promote and share good practice.

- 1.28 The key aims of the evaluation were to:

- consider the range of housing options that each Hub pursues for people as a means of prevention
- examine homelessness prevention trends across the Hubs
- describe the range of housing options used for particular groups
- monitor the use made of the Communities of Practice website for information sharing
- assess the change in culture that has occurred as a result of Hub working

no homeless application is made (i.e. those not appearing in the HL1 data). This means it does not and cannot measure people who don't make a homeless application.

² Section 11 requires mortgage lenders, private landlords and/or registered social landlords (RSLs) to inform the relevant local authority when they initiate legal proceedings to repossess a property. The local authority may then be able to take action to help prevent homelessness occurring.

³ Homelessness Prevention and Relief: England 2009/10 Experimental Statistics

- examine Hub working across local authorities in Scotland
- identify best practice within and between Hubs in the way that they work towards a housing options approach
- consider how this way of working can most effectively contribute towards meeting the 2012 homelessness target
- identify areas where working partnerships can be improved and make recommendations for improvements
- consider how Hubs can contribute towards delivering the 2012 homelessness target and work on homelessness and its prevention after 2012
- consider how this way of working could be effectively utilised in other policy areas.

1.29 The next chapter provides details of the methodology used in the evaluation.

2 METHODS

2.1 This chapter provides details of the methodology used in the evaluation.

2.2 The evaluation adopted a mixed method approach comprising:

- telephone scoping interviews with the representative of the 'lead' local authority for each Hub⁴
- qualitative research (a combination of focus groups and telephone in-depth interviews) with local authority Hub members
- monitoring of the level and type of contact Hubs had through the Communities of Practice website
- telephone in-depth interviews with a sample of local authority Heads of Service
- secondary data analysis of national HL1, HL2 and Audit Scotland Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI) data
- data scoping with each local authority to gather information on the types of activity they are doing and the data that they are recording in relation to housing options.

Scoping interviews with Hub leads

2.3 As the first stage of the qualitative research, telephone scoping interviews were undertaken with the main representative of each of the five 'lead' local authorities. Each interview lasted around 45 minutes. The purpose of these interviews was to gather information on the working practices of each Hub, explore progress and gain the views of the 'lead' representative on ways in which the Hub had worked to date. As with all qualitative elements of the evaluation, the interviews were conducted using a topic guide designed by Ipsos MORI with input from the Scottish Government (Annex A). All interviews were conducted between 20th April and 3rd May 2011.

Focus groups and depth interviews with local authority representatives

2.4 The second stage of the qualitative research involved a member of the research team attending a prearranged meeting of each Hub. The researcher observed the meeting and, immediately following the meeting, conducted a focus group with Hub members. The observation allowed the research team to see firsthand what happened at a Hub meeting and the way in which Hub members interacted. Hub members who were absent from the meeting were interviewed via telephone at a later date. Table 2.1 provides details of the number of participants consulted by both methods in each Hub.

⁴ Each Hub had a 'lead' authority which was responsible for the organisation and administration of the Hub, as well as providing advice and guidance to other authorities in some instances.

Table 2.1: Number of participants in each consulted by focus group and telephone interview

Hub	Focus group	Telephone interviews
West	5	4
Ayrshire and South	4	1
Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders	5	1
North and Islands	6	1
Tayside, Fife and Central	5	1
All	25	8

2.5 The focus group discussions lasted around 75 minutes and the telephone interviews lasted around 60 minutes. Focus group and telephone interview discussions covered local authority representatives' views on how they felt their Hub had worked so far, how it was helping their local authority to implement housing options, and how Hub working could be improved. Topic guides are included at Annex B and Annex C. Fieldwork was undertaken between 10th October 2011 and 13th March 2012.

Depth interviews with local authority Heads of Service

2.6 As the final stage of the qualitative research, telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of eight local authority Heads of Service (or equivalent). The sample included the four 'lead' local authorities⁵ and four other local authorities⁶ selected with the aim of getting perspectives from authorities that were at different stages and facing different challenges in developing their housing options approach. These interviews had a particular focus on any cultural changes in their local authority since the inception of the Hubs and included consideration of the wider applicability of the model. The topic guide is included at Annex D. Each interview lasted around 30 minutes and fieldwork was conducted between 7th December 2011 and 31st January 2012.

Monitoring of the Communities of Practice website

2.7 To establish the extent to which the Communities of Practice website was used to share information, the evaluation also included analysis of website administration data, provided by the Scottish Government. This included analysis of:

- the number of times the website had been visited
- the profile of website users (in terms of organisation they worked for)
- the number and types of posts that were made to the website.

⁵ The Head of Service at the remaining 'lead' authority was unable for interview during the fieldwork period.

⁶ The original intention was to obtain the views of five non-'lead' local authorities. Unfortunately, despite repeated efforts, we were unable to schedule an interview with the 5th chosen participant within the fieldwork period.

- 2.8 These quantitative measures were supplemented by subjective evidence about website usage collected during qualitative research with Hub members.

Secondary data analysis

- 2.9 The secondary data analysis phase of the work was designed to provide context to the study and is included in Section 1. Initial analysis also included Audit Scotland Statutory Performance Indicators (SPI) data (2009-10) and Scottish Housing Regulator Annual Performance Statistics (also 2009-10) as well as data provided by local authorities to the Scottish Housing Best Value Network as part of their Homelessness Benchmarking. That analysis, while interesting, had limitations due to the different time period of datasets and the scope of the existing secondary data. New data were released on 14th February 2012 and has been incorporated into the analysis.

Data scoping

- 2.10 After participating in the focus group or telephone interview covering the Hub approach more generally, local authority representatives were invited to participate in a telephone interview that focused on their approach to data collection and monitoring⁷. The interviews explored where data is held, what data is collected and how easy the data is to analyse and report on. Respondents were asked to reflect on their current experience and future plans, and to identify any challenges. They were also asked to reflect on the role of the Hub so far in monitoring. Findings from the data scoping stage are outlined in Chapter 3. The topic guide is included at Annex E.
- 2.11 Interviews were conducted with 31 members of staff involved in the five Hubs (Table 2.2). Most of the participants had attended at least one Hub meeting, although a few had a data or performance management role that meant they did not attend meetings but had an interest in monitoring. In a few local authorities, where different people were involved in the Hubs or where roles were split between operational staff and strategy or performance staff, for example, more than one interview was undertaken.

Table 2.2: data scoping interviews

Hub	Number of interviews
West	8
Ayrshire and South	6
Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders	6
North and Islands	6
Tayside, Fife and Central	5
All	31

⁷ The original intention was to build a map of local authority data in consultation with staff and then conduct some analysis of prevention data. However, it became clear from an early stage that this was not likely to be feasible as local authorities were at different stages in their adoption of housing options, with many new to the concept and the approach. It was decided instead to focus on some analysis of data to set the context for future prevention work and to explore in more detail the challenges faced by local authorities as they prepare to develop and monitor housing options.

Analysis of qualitative data

- 2.12 With the permission of participants, focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The analysis of the qualitative data was carried out in two stages. The first step involved becoming familiar with the data by reading through transcripts. At this stage, initial impressions or emerging themes were noted. The second stage involved identifying the key themes in the data and organising the data into categories and sub categories. Both stages were framed by the original aims of the evaluation to ensure that the analysis was focused on answering the key research questions.
- 2.13 This analysis and the identification of emerging key themes was informed by several brainstorming sessions conducted by the research team, and related discussions with the Scottish Government, throughout the study.

Limitations of the evaluation and interpretation of findings

- 2.14 As discussed in section 1.9, local authorities have been making progress towards meeting the 2012 homelessness target, with the most recent statistics showing a 20% fall in the total number of homelessness presentations from Q3 of 2010 to Q3 of 2011. However, it should be borne in mind that this evaluation is limited in the extent to which it can attribute this progress to the introduction of the Hubs; the evaluation was primarily a process rather than an impact evaluation and, at the time of fieldwork, Hubs were still in the early stages of development. Furthermore, as discussed in section 1.27, approaches to monitoring the effects of prevention activity are still being developed.
- 2.15 The findings of the evaluation are promising in the sense that Hub members are positive about the potential impact of the Hubs and housing options more generally. However, at this stage, it is only possible to discuss the findings around the benefits of the Hubs in terms of the effect Hubs have had on encouraging local authorities to implement housing options approaches and the extent to which these approaches are improved as a result of the Hubs. It should also be borne in mind that the findings are based on the perceptions of local authority representatives involved in the Hub process as opposed to being based on independent, objective measures of change. The views of service users are also not part of this evaluation.

Structure of the report

- 2.16 The report begins by providing factual information on the composition and workings of the Hubs. This is followed by a discussion of the perceived benefits of the Hubs. The report then considers the key success factors required to facilitate effective Hub working and the barriers that exist to prevent these benefits from being achieved. The report then discusses the future of the Hub approach. The report concludes with a consideration of the wider applicability of the approach to other service areas and outlines best practice to ensure anyone looking to use the Hub model could get the most from their Hub.

3 OVERVIEW OF THE HUBS

- 3.1 This chapter provides a broad overview of the structure and management of the Homelessness Hubs in Scotland. In particular, it outlines:
- the composition of each of the Hubs
 - how the Hub approach differed from other joint working activities
 - the arrangements Hubs had in place to facilitate meetings
 - how often Hubs met
 - how Hubs spent the 'enabling' funding
 - the ways in which Hubs communicated, including the extent to which the Communities of Practice website was used
 - approaches local authorities currently have in place to monitor housing options outcomes.

How was each Hub comprised?

- 3.2 There are five regional Hubs created across Scotland. As discussed in Chapter 1, Hubs are grouped by geography, bringing together neighbouring local authorities. Table 3.1 below shows the composition of each Hub. Two of the Hubs (North & Islands; and West) have seven local authority members, and two of the Hubs (Edinburgh, Lothians & Borders; and Tayside, Fife & Central) have six members, while the Ayrshire & South Hub has five. After participating in the early meetings of the West Hub, one local authority chose not to participate in the Hubs process.
- 3.3 At the inception of the Hubs approach local authorities were at different stages in developing the housing options approach: ranging from those who had already developed an approach (and had been delivering the approach for some time) to those who had not yet started developing their approach to housing options.
- 3.4 In addition to local authority members, three Hubs had invited external organisations, including RSLs and third sector agencies, to become part of their Hub:
- Glasgow Housing Association (GHA), the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) and Glasgow & West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations, the Glasgow Homelessness Network are members of the West Hub
 - Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association is a member of the North & Islands Hub

- Edinburgh Cyrenians Trust is a member of the Edinburgh, Lothians & Borders Hub.

3.5 While some partner organisations had attended meetings regularly, others had not attended a meeting or had done so irregularly. Other external organisations, namely third sector agencies, including Scottish Social Networks, had attended meetings on an ad hoc basis but were not formal partners of any Hub. At the time of fieldwork, all Hubs had ambitions to extend their membership in the future to include external partners (although some local authorities were engaging with external organisations at a local level). This included RSLs, private sector landlords and third sector organisations.

Table 3.1: Composition of Hubs (as of March 2012)

Hub	Lead local authority	Member local authorities	Other members
Ayrshire & South	North Ayrshire	Dumfries and Galloway, East Ayrshire , Inverclyde Council, South Ayrshire	
Edinburgh, Lothians & Borders	Edinburgh City	East Lothian, Falkirk Council, Midlothian, Scottish Borders, West Lothian.	Edinburgh Cyrenians Trust
North & Islands	Highland	Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Eilean Siar, Moray, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands.	Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association
Tayside, Fife & Central	Perth and Kinross	Angus, Argyll and Bute, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Fife Council.	
West	East Dunbartonshire	East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire Council, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire	Glasgow Housing Association; Scottish Federation of Housing Associations; Glasgow & West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations; Glasgow Homelessness Network

How did the Hub approach differ from other joint working activities?

3.6 At the outset, most Hub members were already members of existing housing-related networks designed to facilitate communication between local authorities, including the Scottish Housing Best Value Network (SHBVN) and the Scottish Council for Single Homeless (SCSH) Homelessness Strategy Officers Group. Members felt that the Hubs approach differed from these groups in a number of ways:

- Hub meetings were more locally-focused around issues specific to a small group of local authorities

- there was funding allocated to the Hub to facilitate joint projects
 - the focus of discussions within Hubs was more on day-to-day operational aspects, rather than higher level discussions around policy and strategy.
- 3.7 In some cases, the Hub built on existing relationships between local authorities - for example, North, South and East Ayrshire in the Ayrshire & South Hub had a history of joint working in housing and other service areas - and in a number of the Hubs, many members were familiar with each other from participation in working groups and attendance at ad hoc events. However, the Hubs also brought together contacts within local authorities who had no previous working relationships.

How were meetings organised?

- 3.8 Each Hub had a 'lead' (or 'host') authority which was the main contact for the Hub and was responsible for hosting meetings and co-ordinating the activities of the Hub. Activities included: the organisation and facilitation of meetings, the preparation of action plans and quarterly reports, and the dissemination of materials.
- 3.9 The responsibility of becoming the 'lead' authority was allocated on a volunteer basis. The Hubs model did not mirror the approach taken in England where groups of local authorities were assigned a designated "Mentor", that is a local authority which had developed enhanced housing options services and had responsibility for disseminating good practice to others. In some Hubs, the 'lead' was the most advanced in their development of the housing options approach. In other Hubs, the 'lead' was not necessarily more advanced than other members but volunteered to become the 'lead' for more practical reasons – for example, geographic location. Some 'leads' were happy to be considered the 'lead' of the process, taking on the role of 'mentor'; while others considered themselves much more of a 'host', seeing themselves as being responsible for facilitating the process, rather than having an overt mentoring role.
- 3.10 Two of the Hubs had commissioned external organisations to assist with the administration of Hub activities: one brought in help at the very start of Hub development, while the other brought in assistance in autumn 2011 having already had a series of meetings. One Hub utilised internal administration support to assist with Hub-related tasks. The remaining two 'leads' carried out tasks without any specific administration support.
- 3.11 For the most part, one representative from each local authority attended meetings, although it was not uncommon for local authorities to be represented by more than one representative at Hub meetings.

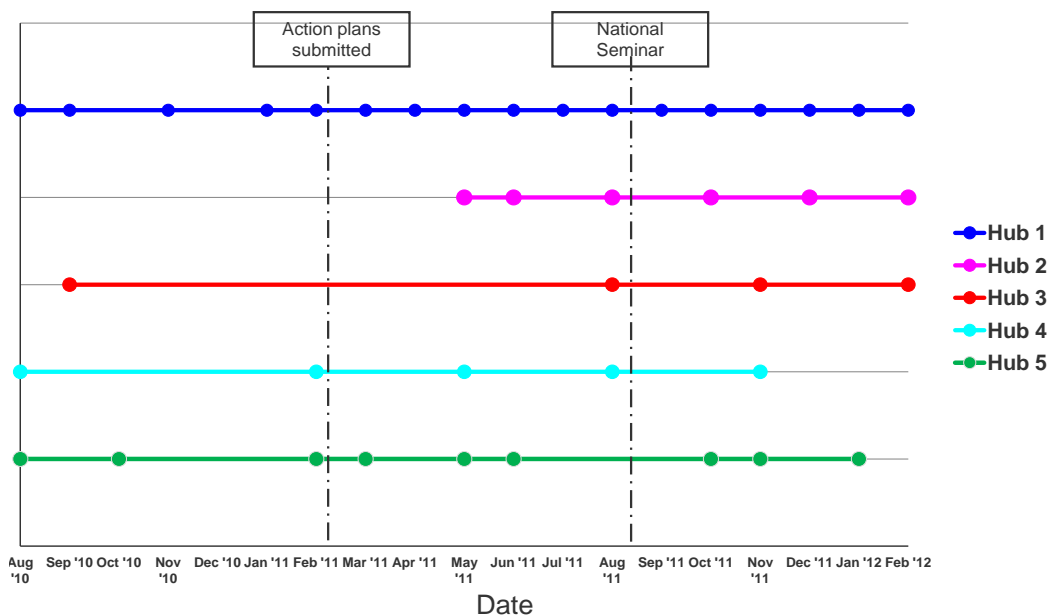
How often did Hubs meet?

- 3.12 The Scottish Government/COSLA 2012 Joint Steering Group held a seminar on 15th June 2010 to launch the Hubs initiative. Subsequent regional seminars were held with each of the five Hubs between 19th August and

13th September 2010. The aim of each seminar was to provide an overview of the direction of the housing options approach and guidance on how the enabling funding could be best utilised by the Hubs.

- 3.13 On 25th August 2011 a further seminar was held to mark the one-year anniversary of the launch of the Hubs approach. The aim of the event was to showcase the work of the Hubs, facilitate the sharing of best practice between local authorities, and allow networking between Hub members and representatives from the wider housing sector.
- 3.14 Figure 3.1 below provides details of when each Hub has held meetings up until the end of the fieldwork period. Four of the Hubs had their first meeting within two months of the launch of the Hubs initiative in June 2010, while the initial meeting of the remaining Hub took place in May 2011. When possible, Hubs made efforts to meet on a regular basis (although one did wait nine months between their first and second meetings) but some did so more frequently than others: one met monthly, three met every six weeks and one met quarterly. As a result, there was huge variation in the number of meetings held across the five Hubs.

Figure 3.1: Meetings by Hub (August 2010 to 29th February 2012)



How did Hubs spend the ‘enabling’ funding?

- 3.15 To support the Hubs and the development of services around the housing options approach, the Scottish Government made around £500,000 worth of funding available to assist Hubs in adopting and implementing housing options services, which would be made available to Hubs for 14 months until 31st March 2012. To be allocated funding, each Hub was required to submit an action plan which outlined a number of desired outcomes for the Hub, the proposed action to achieve each outcome, and associated estimated timescales and levels of funding required to deliver each.
- 3.16 Hubs submitted action plans to the Scottish Government up to February 2011. Four of the Hubs developed their action plans during the initial

meeting(s) and sent action plans to the Scottish Government before the deadline. One Hub, which was late in scheduling their initial meeting, submitted their action plan after the deadline.

3.17 The types of planned actions included:

- 'benchmarking' exercises to establish the baseline position of each member authority in relation to housing options
- training needs analysis
- consultancy to identify best practice examples of housing options across the UK
- joint branding and advertising initiatives
- procurement of shared IT facilities.

3.18 Table 3.2 provides details of the funding initially awarded to each Hub, based on their original action plans, and the actual amount spent by each, as of the end of the funding period (by 31st March 2012⁸). Overall, 71% of the funding that was originally awarded to Hubs had been spent.

3.19 In December 2011 the Scottish Government asked the Hubs to put forward proposals for projects to mitigate the effects of upcoming housing benefit reforms. The Minister for Housing and Transport had announced additional funding of £35,000 for this purpose in November and this was supplemented by £60,810 from underspend in the Hubs budget. Proposals were required by 19th December 2011 and funding was allocated in early January 2012. In total £95,810 was awarded to Hubs to carry out these activities.

⁸ Please note: the spend figures included in Table 3.2 are based on all spend by the Hubs up until 31st March 2012 but prior to the final accounting closure of 2011/2012. Therefore, they represent the anticipated final spend, rather than the *actual* final spend. The final figures may deviate slightly from those included in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Funding spend, by Hub (by 31st March 2012)

Hub	Original award	Spend (31 st March 2012)	% of original award spent	Funding for mitigation activity (Dec 2011)	Total potential spend (Hub projects + mitigation activity)
Hub 1	£113,000	£113,000	100%	£30,000	£143,000
Hub 2	£88,875	£61,697	69%	£20,000	£81,697
Hub 3	£88,000	£51,075	58%		£51,075
Hub 4	£63,500	£43,191	68%	£10,810	£54,001
Hub 5	£71,350	£30,716	43%	£35,000	£65,716
<i>Total</i>	<i>£424,725</i>	<i>£299,679</i>	<i>71%</i>	£95,810 (£60,810 from Hubs underspend; £35,000 from SG Welfare Reform)	£395,489

3.20 To monitor progress against meeting the desired outcomes set out in action plans, each Hub was required to submit a progress report to the Scottish Government on a quarterly basis. Quarterly reports and action plans were made available on the Communities of Practice website (see below for more information).

How did Hubs communicate?

3.21 For the most part, Hub members communicated through conventional means. Outside of face-to-face meetings, the dissemination of materials and discussions relating to the Hub took place via email and, less commonly, by telephone. As well as conventional communication methods, one Hub communicated using 'Basecamp', a project management software package, used to facilitate information sharing and discussion in relation to the ongoing research project commissioned by the Hub.

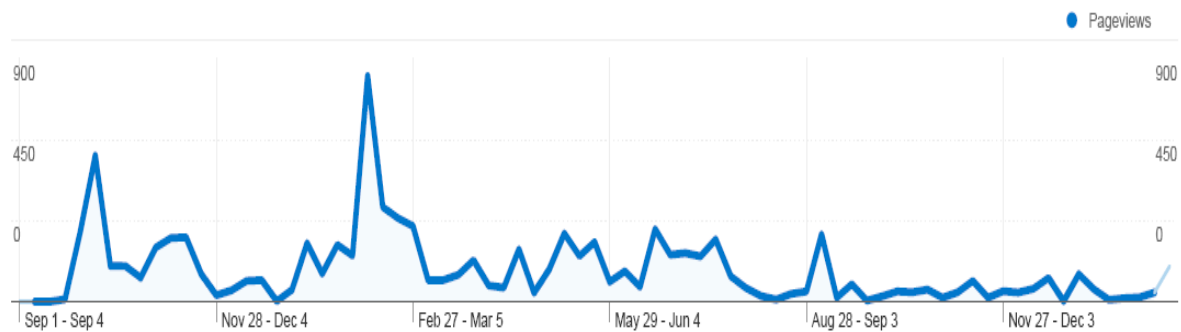
To what extent did Hubs use the communities of practice website?

3.22 The Communities of Practice website, which was created to facilitate the process of information sharing and communication between local authorities within and across Hubs, and with external partners, was not used frequently by Hub members, or by individuals outside of local authorities.

3.23 Figure 3.2 shows the number of visits made between 1st September 2010 and 16th February 2012. The most visits to the website were made during the initial stages of the Hub and, specifically, around the time when action plans were submitted. The number of visits to the website has subsequently decreased (even though this also coincided with an increase in membership of the website). Please note: the analysis on usage includes members of the

site who were facilitators of the website who, due to their role, might be expected to visit the website more often than average.

Figure 3.2: Visits made to the Communities of Practice website (1st September 2010 – February 2012)



Source: Google Analytics data

- 3.24 The website had 128 members (this excludes five members classified as ‘facilitators’ e.g. staff working on the website or members of the homelessness policy team at the Scottish Government) from a range of organisations: 59 members from 27 local authorities; 29 from organisations involved in housing policy or support (including third sector organisations); 19 from the Scottish Government; 14 from academic organisations or research consultancies; three from RSLs, and three from third sector organisations not directly involved in housing support. One member did not provide details of their organisation.
- 3.25 The website was not extensively used by members to share information or communicate with other members. A total of 33 contributions were made to the website by 16 members between 1st September 2010 and 15th February 2011. This included: 20 forum posts; seven events listings; two blog entries; two documents posts; and two responses to document posts. Please note that this excludes posts made by facilitators of the website, who posted action plans; quarterly reports; and presentations from the National Seminar held in August 2011.
- 3.26 The most contributions were made by members from: organisations involved in housing policy or support (15 contributions made by seven members); and local authorities (14 contributions made by six members).
- 3.27 It was felt that the website did not fulfil its potential. There were a mixture of practical, usability and cultural reasons why the website was not used more regularly:
- there were existing established means of communicating with other members, namely email and telephone, or asking for advice – for example, the SCSH Homelessness Strategy Officers Network or SHBVN groups

- the website was perceived to be cumbersome – in particular users felt that it took too long to access information on the website and they did not understand why they had to use a password to access the site
- Hub members who were keen to find out more about work going on in other Hubs commented that there was little up-to-date information on the website about the *current* activities of Hubs – while quarterly reports were published, they represented the work of the Hubs for the previous three months.
- linked to the importance of trust between members (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5), some Hub members did not feel comfortable sharing Hub outputs or posting comments on a public forum for other local authorities to read. They were concerned that it could be perceived that they were putting themselves forward as experts on an issue or make themselves open to scrutiny
- there was not a culture among local authorities of proactively sharing information
- as the website was not used often by members there was little to be gained by accessing the site as there was no flow of information.

Approaches to monitoring homelessness prevention

As well as exploring Hub members' views on the Hub initiative more generally, another element of the evaluation explored local authorities' approaches to collecting data on, and monitoring, homelessness prevention and housing options outcomes.

Existing monitoring systems and processes

- 3.28 A minority of local authorities would admit that they are so early on in their adoption of housing options that they currently have no data to monitor prevention activity at all. Prevention work is being done and logged on paper but not entered into databases, or data is collected using ad-hoc Excel spreadsheets. These local authorities are in the minority and they envisage adopting a solution within the next six months.
- 3.29 More commonly, however, are various ad-hoc systems and add-ons to systems that allow some monitoring of prevention activity. Some link directly into HL1⁹ reporting systems while others do not. Some are part of bespoke, local authority-designed data systems and others are purchased from external providers and require liaison with the external provider to update.
- 3.30 A number of local authorities felt that the annual homelessness data were already 'out of date' as far as their achievements and developments were concerned (bearing in mind, the fieldwork took place before the publication of

⁹ HL1 collects information about advice and assistance provided to people who are assessed as threatened with homelessness or not homeless, a sub-set of all applicants. This provides some evidence of the broad range of activities being undertaken but does not cover households for whom no homeless application is made (i.e. those not appearing in the HL1 data). This means it does not and cannot measure people who don't make a homeless application.

data in February). They felt that the progress on housing options 'on the ground' has been very significant indeed. A smaller number of local authorities are not in a position yet to have started to make progress.

- 3.31 The majority of local authorities operate performance management cycles on a quarterly and monthly basis, depending on the indicators. On some indicators, such as temporary accommodation usage or arrears management, for example, data is looked at on a weekly basis.
- 3.32 There were frustrations with data systems, with very few local authorities able to input, collate and report their data in the way that they would like to, in an 'ideal world'. Some local authorities are wedded to an in-house database that covers a range of services and so they must schedule time from IT support staff if they want anything added into their reporting system. Others had opted for proprietary 'products' bought in to use for their entire housing management data or their HL1 reporting. A fair number have already bought 'advice and assistance' modules while others are considering these or working with software consultants at the moment to spec these out.

Data aspirations

- 3.33 Not one single local authority participant was entirely content with their current data position. However, most were satisfied that they either had what they needed to begin to monitor prevention activity, or would at least be in that position within a short time-frame, such as before the end of the financial year or a few months after.
- 3.34 A number of local authorities are adopting a 'watch and wait' approach. There was, in fact, some consternation that the Scottish Government had included looking at monitoring within the Hubs evaluation at this stage when no guidance had been received about what monitoring the government would wish to see. On this final issue, a number of local authorities praised the work of the Scottish Government through the HL1 data users group and a few mentioned the pro-forma¹⁰ currently being piloted as something that they were looking to use for their prevention monitoring purposes.
- 3.35 In fact, there were local authorities that were waiting until the final version of the pro-forma is agreed before finalising their data. This was to ensure that the approach is as efficient as possible. That is, if an external consultant or internal staff time is required to update the system to insert new fields in the database, it is preferable to do this at one time.
- 3.36 Others were more confident in developing their own approach to data systems, either as a local authority or as part of the Hub. Some local authorities have a very clear sense of how they plan to develop and monitor their service and see any work that the Hub might do, or the Scottish Government might do, as secondary to their own aspirations. These local

¹⁰ The draft pro-forma is included as Annex F. The form collects data on prevention activity at the local authority rather than the case level (so more similar to HL2 than HL1 in that respect). Activities are separated under the heading of 'able to stay in existing home' and 'assisted to obtain alternative accommodation' as collected by DCLG in England

authorities tend to be those with the strongest ethos around performance management and the most well-developed data systems.

4 WHAT BENEFITS HAVE THE HUBS ACHIEVED?

- 4.1 This chapter details the main ways in which Hub members felt they had benefited from being part of the Hub process. It outlines the perceived immediate benefits of the Hubs approach in relation to:
- how it helped to create 'buy in' to the housing options approach
 - how it helped local authorities with the development of the housing options approach.

Encouraging a culture change among local authorities

- 4.2 The Hubs were established in part to try and encourage a culture change among local authorities in the way in which they dealt with homelessness presentations and to promote best practice around homelessness prevention. While it was outwith the scope of this evaluation to provide an objective measure of the impact made by Hubs in bringing about this culture change, there was a perception among Hub members and Heads of Service that the Hubs approach had benefited local authorities and helped to encourage a culture change among members of the Hub and others within their local authority, as outlined below.
- 4.3 There was evidence to suggest that the Hubs benefited local authorities in two ways:
- helping to increase '*buy in*' to the housing options approach
 - assisting local authorities in the *development* of housing options approaches.
- 4.4 It was evident throughout the evaluation that those local authorities in the early stages of developing housing options had benefited more from the Hubs initiative than those who had already implemented, or were in the process of implementing, the approach. Indeed, those local authorities who were already delivering housing options, by definition, had already 'bought in' to housing options, and had already implemented their approach. Similarly, those who were in the process of implementing housing options services had already 'bought in' to the approach (although the Hub member and/or others in their local authority may not have done so fully).
- 4.5 Accordingly, Hub members from local authorities who were already delivering housing options discussed how they had made very few changes, if any, to their existing housing options approaches, as a result of being part of the Hubs. Nevertheless, they welcomed the opportunity to work more closely with other local authorities and recognised their role in the Hubs process, in helping local authorities who "were further behind the curve" gain confidence in the approach and develop their housing options services.

to answer the question in relation to [Local Authority] then it probably hasn't made that much difference, but my impression is

that for those councils that were maybe finding it harder, maybe hadn't done some of the thinking that maybe a smaller minority of councils had done, that hadn't already got a vision in place in terms of prevention, then I think probably the answer would be different for them, they would probably think it had really helped.

(Head of Service)

- 4.6 However, the success of the Hubs approach was reliant upon more advanced local authorities participating in the process. Without this participation, many less advanced local authorities would not have benefited from being part of the Hub as much as they had – in particular, the sharing of best practice and information, would not have been as effective (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).
- 4.7 It is important to highlight that, at the time of fieldwork, all Hubs were still developing as a group (although they were all at different stages of development) and had not yet benefited fully from the Hubs approach. Many of the planned Hub activities were ongoing or had not yet started and, as a result, not all of the desired outcomes of the Hubs had been achieved. Furthermore, two of the Hubs, who had met infrequently, had only just started to actively share best practice within the group.

Increasing 'buy in' to the housing options approach

- 4.8 At the outset, some Hub members were sceptical about the housing options approach. This scepticism stemmed from three factors:
- reservations about the suitability of the approach for particular local authorities. These areas tended to be where there were fewer 'options' for clients: for example, rural areas or areas with either very high demand for private renting or a very small and under-developed private rented sector
 - concerns that housing options was a move towards 'gate keeping' of services, that is that the approach actively seeks to prevent someone from making a homelessness application
 - apprehension about adopting the approach in the absence of formal guidance from the Scottish Government or endorsement of the approach from the Scottish Housing Regulator.
- 4.9 As a consequence, they entered the Hub approach with a degree of apprehension but were "willing to dip their toe in the water".
- 4.10 There was evidence that the Hubs helped to create 'buy in' to the housing options approach, particularly among local authorities who had not yet developed, or were in the early stages of developing, their housing options approaches. This happened in two ways:
- the Hubs helped to raise the profile of housing options
 - the Hubs helped to legitimise and build confidence in the approach.

Raising the profile of housing options

- 4.11 The launch of Hubs in June 2010, coupled with the announcement of funding to support the process, signalled the Scottish Government's endorsement of the housing options approach, as something that all local authorities should adopt. The national seminar in June 2010 and the series of seminars with each Hub across Scotland in autumn 2010, helped to raise the profile of housing options and create 'buy in' to the approach among senior staff:

The original Scottish Government event, that I suppose led to the Hubs, I think that was probably interesting in terms of getting buy in from more senior people and I think the presentations at that were quite powerful. So, certainly, that initial impetus and the initial experiences of people, you know, the success stories from elsewhere, I think were quite a powerful tool.

(Head of Service)

- 4.12 This was helped by Scottish Government representatives, who attended a number of Hub meetings, leaving a perception among Hub members that the Scottish Government were taking an interest in the activities of the Hub and were available to answer queries about housing options and the Hubs approach.

- 4.13 As evidence of this, some Hub members said that the Hubs process had acted as a 'stick' and put pressure on senior management in their local authority to 'buy in' to the housing options approach and support it with suitable levels of funding. There was a feeling that local authorities did not want to be seen as a local authority who was not implementing the approach:

it actually added credence to the housing options approach, if your neighbouring authorities are all adopting a particular approach then at some point there would be questions as to why you weren't participating.

(Hub member)

- 4.14 This was supported by representatives from each local authority who attended Hubs and, in many cases, had mechanisms in place to feed back Hub discussions and activities to senior management and other staff within their local authorities. For example, a number of Hub members described how the work of the Hub was a standing item for discussion at their local authority's homelessness strategy partnership group meetings, or equivalent.

Legitimising and building confidence in the housing options

- 4.15 In addition to raising the profile of housing options, there was evidence to indicate that the Hubs helped to legitimise and build confidence in the approach in two ways.
- 4.16 First, among local authorities who had already begun to implement the housing options approach, being part of the Hubs process and learning about the experiences of other local authorities about how housing options

was working in their area, helped to validate their decision to implement housing options:

...you can see it working elsewhere, you can see other people doing it, like some of the things we heard from [other local authorities]...you can see other people's success in doing it and it does give you the confidence to carry on and follow it through.

(Hub member)

4.17 This was reinforced in a number of local authorities by visits made by Hub members and other staff in their local authorities to more advanced local authorities to observe how housing options services worked in practice (see below for more discussion about job shadowing).

4.18 Second, among Hub members whose local authority had not yet adopted the housing options approach, or who had doubts about the approach, being part of the Hub and learning from others legitimised the approach and gave them confidence that it was something they should take forward:

I think the initial issues we faced... was this feeling that it wouldn't work, it couldn't work, you couldn't do things differently, so actually listening to people that had done things differently [...] I think was quite a powerful message...the Hubs have been part of the process almost of deciding is this the way we're going? In my head it wasn't a given at the beginning, it was 'well, what does this look like, what does it taste like, what does it feel like, can it work, can it be applied, how will we apply it?'

(Head of Service)

4.19 A few Hub members discussed how the Hub had provided them with a tangible Scottish evidence base on the effectiveness of the housing options approach, that they could use to help convince senior officials and elected members within their local authority of the value of housing options:

the Hub approach...has allowed us to break down some of that kind of cynicism that was around originally and you can see it shifting...you can actually see that's having an impact in terms of shifting peoples thinking here.

(Head of Service)

4.20 A common view among Hub members was that being part of the Hub provided them with reassurance that local authorities were all facing similar challenges and pressures to meet the 2012 homelessness target, and that the Hubs provided a support network; that they were not "in it alone". Related to this, a few Hub members, mainly from rural and island authorities, who had doubts about the suitability of the housing options approach for their area (in light of the types of options available to clients in their area) felt that being able to discuss their concerns with representatives from local authorities in a similar position gave them the confidence to decide that their local authority could not fully implement the approach.

Helping local authorities to develop the housing options approach

Sharing of information and best practice

- 4.21 The main way in which Hubs help local authorities to develop the housing options approach was through the sharing of best practice and information between member local authorities. For the most part, this involved Hubs with housing options approaches already in place, sharing that best practice with those still developing their approach.
- 4.22 Best practice information was shared in the following ways:
- at Hub meetings – mainly via round table discussions but also the sharing of policy and procedure documents and research articles
 - follow-up visits to local authorities – for example, job shadowing
 - follow-up email or telephone exchanges
 - as already described above, via the Communities of Practice Website.
- 4.23 At meetings, Hub members were able to share experiences of implementing housing options and best practice in relation to the approach, which could be used by less developed local authorities to advance the development of their housing options approaches.

we have been able to tap into other local authorities and benefit from the experience in setting up a homeless prevention team and adopting a homeless options model, because we are being kind of behind them in terms of that approach. That's been the main advantage to us; we have learned from the experience and hopefully we won't make the same mistakes.

(Hub member)

- 4.24 The types of best practice information shared through the Hub included:
- on a general level, Hub members shared lessons about what worked and did not work when their local authority was implementing housing options services
 - sharing policies and procedures documents – for example, one Hub shared each member authority's allocation policies to generate ideas about how they might be adapted
 - sharing experiences of using IT systems and other infrastructure which is used to help deliver housing options services
 - sharing experiences of engaging external partners – for example, one local authority shared the difficulties they had engaging with private landlords in their area and how these difficulties were overcome; while in a different Hub, member local authorities were able to learn about a local authority's experience of developing a common housing register,

developing deposit guarantee schemes and building relationships in the private sector

- learning about innovative ways of preventing homelessness – for example, one local authority shared their experiences of taking the approach to inform clients on their housing list about their chances of being allocated a home.

4.25 In some cases, local authorities made visits to other local authorities in their Hub to learn more about their housing options approach and observe the activities of frontline staff who were delivering the approach on a daily basis. These visits were seen as being very beneficial to local authorities who were in the process of developing their own approach to housing options and as being more useful than simply discussing issues within meetings, as they showed the theory being applied in practice. As a representative from one local authority, who had taken staff to another local authority within his Hub as part of a job shadowing exercise, explained, the visits were extremely useful as they provided staff with firsthand experience of housing options at the point of delivery and helped to build confidence in the new approach:

I think it has helped to introduce people to that different approach to dealing with homelessness...they can see for themselves and talk to the people in these authorities, their equivalent roles, just to get first hand, I suppose information. The senior homelessness staff that we have taken are beginning to change their views, so I think it has been helpful.

(Hub member).

4.26 There were a number of examples of where local authorities had benefited from learning from local authorities in other Hubs; for example, a number of local authorities had visited the same local authority that had a well developed housing options approach. However, these arrangements were largely independent of individual Hubs and would probably have taken place without the existence of the Hubs.

4.27 Hub members also exchanged information with one another on a more informal basis outwith meetings and field visits. Hub members felt that the Hub had helped them to develop relationships with representatives in other local authorities who they could call for advice and reassurance about housing options services on a more ad hoc and informal basis. A common view was that relationships developed through the Hub would “last beyond the life of the Hubs or funding”.

the informal side of it as well is good because it is good having a point of contact in each council that you can phone up or email with any particular issues, so that's been be very useful...I think as we get closer to 2012 there has been more, not panic, but more concern about certain things it's always good to have that point of contact at the end of the phone.

(Head of Service).

- 4.28 While information sharing and communication worked well within Hubs, a common view among Hub members was that they would have liked there to have been more formal mechanisms in place to facilitate information and best practice sharing between Hubs (and with other local authorities within those Hubs).
- 4.29 When information was shared between Hubs, this process was facilitated by the Scottish Government, including: the National Housing Options Seminar; attendance by Scottish Government representatives at Hub meetings; and specific instances when Scottish Government representatives shared information and documents from members of one Hub with others. For example, the Scottish Government shared one Hub's Housing Options Hub Protocol¹¹ with other Hubs.
- 4.30 Hub members spoke highly of the National Housing Options Hubs Seminar and were positive about times when Scottish Government representatives attended Hubs, for the reasons:
- they helped Hub members learn about what activities were being carried out in other Hubs
 - the Scottish Government could provide advice and answer questions about housing options and the homelessness Hubs approach
 - Hub members could learn about ongoing research and policy development that may impact on homelessness services
 - the Scottish Government were able to learn about the operational challenges that were facing local authorities.
- 4.31 This notwithstanding, Hub members would have liked the opportunity to learn about other local authorities' (and Hubs') approaches more often (see Chapter 6 for a discussion about how Hubs could be developed).

Hub projects

- 4.32 In addition to acting as an initial incentive for local authorities to become involved in the Hubs process, the award of enabling funding allowed Hubs to carry out joint projects, which helped to inform the development of housing options in local authorities. It is important to bear in mind that at the time of fieldwork, much of the proposed project activities in Hubs were ongoing or were yet to begin. As a result, some of the views of Hub members in relation to project activities were about how they expected projects to benefit their local authority in the development of housing options services.

¹¹ Following consultation work that had been carried out as part of their Hub, one Hub developed a Hub Protocol, which outlined members' shared understanding and definition of housing options and an agreed set of principles which would guide joint-working activities across members of the Hub.

- 4.33 However, joint working projects were perceived to have helped local authorities develop their housing options approaches in a number of ways, including:
- helping local authorities to define and better understand housing options
 - highlighting where gaps existed in the housing options services local authorities were developing
 - identifying the training needs of staff to carry out the housing options service effectively
 - providing staff training
 - helping to engage with external organisations (RSLs, third sector organisations, and private landlords) operating in the area about housing options, through hosting consultation events
 - highlighting best practice examples of housing options services from Scotland and England
 - identifying best practice to enable access to private rented accommodation.
- 4.34 Hubs were also carrying out projects to help member authorities manage the effects of the upcoming housing benefit reforms. As described in Chapter 3, the Scottish Government made available some of the Hubs budget underspend (to supplement additional funding announced by the Minister for Housing and Transport) to carry out projects to mitigate the effects of upcoming housing benefit reforms. These include: carrying out analysis to identify the number of residents who are likely to be affected by the reforms; providing training and briefings to staff; and launching publicity campaigns (including radio broadcasts, and web-based information) to raise awareness of welfare reforms and agencies that are available to offer advice. It was evident throughout the evaluation that there was concern about what proposed Welfare Reform would mean for local authorities' ability to meet the 2012 target.
- 4.35 Hub members discussed how their local authorities would not have been able to carry out many of the projects without the availability of funding. Further, joint commissioning of project-related work allowed local authorities to avoid duplication and achieve economies of scale in terms of the cost and time spent on the projects.
- 4.36 One Hub, in particular, found the project work they were carrying out as part of the Hub very useful. The ongoing consultancy work – which comprised a number of stages, including the identification of best practice from Scotland and England, benchmarking exercises and a series of consultation events – appeared to frame the direction of the Hub and its meetings. Further, at the time of fieldwork, the work was also informing the decision over which type of housing options approach some member local authorities would adopt. The

members of this Hub felt strongly that it was important that they could use the funding to achieve tangible outcomes, such as training needs analysis, rather than simply discussing issues.

- 4.37 On a more basic level, the funding paid travel expenses and subsistence to allow local authority representatives to meet and share best practice and information. This was a particular benefit to the North & Islands Hub, whose members were geographically dispersed. Indeed, the funding allowed island authorities to meet with other local authorities, at a time when their local authority may not have been able to justify the expense of regular travel to the mainland.
- 4.38 The availability of funding benefited some Hubs more than others. As Hubs met more often, they developed a clear purpose and vision of what they wanted to, and could realistically, achieve, and it became apparent that many of the activities outlined in original action plans were either not viable or could be completed without the assistance of funding. Those Hubs who met frequently had time to develop new ideas of how they could use the available funding and were able to revise their action plan accordingly. However, those who did not meet often did not have enough time to develop new ideas for funding (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).

5 KEY SUCCESS FACTORS AND BARRIERS

5.1 A number of factors were identified as having an influence on the success of Hub working and, in particular, the Hubs' ability to achieve the perceived benefits of the approach discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter outlines the key success factors and barriers to successful Hub working in relation to three aspects of the Hub process:

- the early development of the Hubs
- the membership of the Hub
- the management and day-to-day running of Hubs.

5.2 The key success factors for Hubs were:

- spending sufficient time in the early stages to develop clear aims for the Hub
- Hubs being comprised of local authorities at different stages in the development of housing options
- having a committed 'lead' authority
- developing trust, openness and honesty
- having regular and frequent meetings
- having administrative support
- having committed members.

5.3 While, for purposes of reporting, these issues are discussed separately below, in reality a number of the factors were interlinked.

Early development of the Hubs

Spending sufficient time in the early stages to develop clear aims for the Hub

5.4 Hub members highlighted the need to spend sufficient time in the early stages of the Hub developing clear aims and how it might best help meet the needs of member local authorities.

5.5 Hub members who felt that they had received most benefit from the process were part of Hubs who had met most often in the early stages. Making time to meet in the early stages was central to Hubs getting off the ground. In the initial stages it was important for Hub members to spend time: building relationships and trust between members; discussing the key challenges being faced by member local authorities; and identifying what best practice was already being carried out by members of the Hub. Over the course of initial meetings Hubs developed a greater awareness of the challenges that were being faced by member local authorities, and were able to better

understand how Hubs could meet their needs. They were able to develop more considered desired outcomes for the group and generate ideas for spending available funding. Further, where the aims and priorities of the Hub changed over the course of initial meetings, those who met most often in the early stages were able to identify these shifting priorities early and change their action plans accordingly.

- 5.6 The scale of progress made by Hubs in the early stages had a major impact on the development of the Hub in subsequent stages of the process.

Barriers to developing clear aims for the Hub

- 5.7 A number of Hubs found it difficult to develop clear aims for the Hub, particularly in the early stages of their development. Two factors had an impact on this:
- a lack of formal guidance from the Scottish Government on housing options and the Hubs approach
 - too much focus in the early stages on how funding could be spent and short timescales allowed for submitting action plans.
- 5.8 Both of these factors were exacerbated by a lack of meetings in some Hubs in the early stages of their development (the importance of meetings is discussed in more detail below).

Lack of formal guidance

- 5.9 A common view among Hub members was that a lack of guidance provided by the Scottish Government¹² on housing options and the Hubs approach acted as a barrier to the development of Hubs in their early stages and, in particular, prevented Hubs from developing clear aims for their Hub. Hub members did not fully understand the purpose of the Hubs and what they were expected to achieve.
- 5.10 As a consequence, Hubs tended to make slow progress in the early stages. Representatives in some Hubs felt they had wasted a lot of time in early meetings, when there was a “lot of talk without action”. There was a perception among all Hub members, but in particular those from Hubs which had not met often, that the Hubs could have perhaps progressed faster had they received more guidance. However, at the time of fieldwork, the lack of guidance had impacted on Hubs in different ways. On one hand, those who met often in the early stages were able to overcome the lack of guidance and develop their own aims for their Hub. Members of these Hubs felt that, in hindsight, the lack of prescription had been positive for the development of their Hub. They believed the lack of formal guidance allowed the Hub to grow much more naturally than it would have with guidance. This was linked to the

¹² Consistent with the terms of the 2007 concordat between the Scottish Government and local authorities, the Scottish Government chose not to provide prescriptive guidance about how individual Hubs should operate.

fact that these Hubs had met more frequently at the beginning and therefore were able to develop a clear vision and purpose for the Hub.

In many ways I think they were quite organic...Do you know, that's how it certainly transpired, but it does feel as if they were very much about allowing local authorities to come together and run with it themselves because recognising a lot of us were starting from pretty well low base. So, therefore, we had to define what the regional Hubs were for ourselves and I actually think it was a helpful approach.

(Hub Member)

- 5.11 Conversely, at the time of fieldwork, some Hub members felt that their Hub had suffered from the lack of clarity and progress in the early stages in a way that had still not been fully resolved.

It is quite clear they didn't want to prescribe how the Hub should operate...now you have different Hubs working at a different speed, with different agendas, different things, and it could have been done differently...I just feel that they have shoved it on to the local authorities or on to the Hubs just to get on with it and, "oh here have some money just to help you along with that".

(Hub member)

...that needs to come from [the Scottish Government] from the outset to enable [Hubs to] hit the ground running. I think we had a period of bedding in. [This requires] a lot of people from a number of authorities, that's huge resources. You need to have that from the start.

(Hub Member)

Funding provided too early and too short timescales allowed for submitting action plans

- 5.12 As described earlier, local authorities were asked to submit their action plans up to February 2011. In all but one of the Hubs, the action plan was the focus of the initial meeting(s). There was a perception among some Hub members that they were asked to formulate their action plan and apply for funding too early in their development and in too short a timescale.
- 5.13 There was a strong feeling among many participants that the focus on funding so early on in the process was putting the "cart before the horse": participants did not feel they had enough time to discuss in great depth the circumstances of, and challenges faced by, member authorities to be able to arrive at relevant and effective ways of spending the funding. This was particularly the case in Hubs which scheduled multiple meetings in advance of submitting their action plans. All discussions in early meetings were focused on how the funding could be spent. Some Hubs spent very little time reflecting on the purpose of the Hub or discussing best practice being carried out in local authorities. There was a perception that, in many ways, the development of clear aims for the Hub – and subsequent beneficial

discussions around the sharing of best practice and information – in the early stages was “hijacked” by discussions over funding.

I'm going to be quite honest...I think the funding is a slight distraction, because the group becomes focused on how they are going to spend money, rather than focusing on the implementation of an approach...because it is about culture and change of approach.

(Head of Service)

- 5.14 With hindsight, a number of participants suggested that the process would have been improved if, in the initial stages, Hubs were allowed sufficient time to develop naturally as a group and develop a clearer purpose and direction, based on the challenges faced by member local authorities. Only then would Hubs develop ideas for projects, for which funding could be made available, rather than trying to develop ideas for projects that would fit the full funding allocation.

I think in a way it might have worked better the other way around, that the Hubs were set up, we had the opportunity, we have some of the meetings like this and then we have the funding opportunity. We would be in a much better place to know what, as a group, our priorities were. Where just in terms of the time constraints there was a lot of pressure to say, right well you need to jump now.

(Hub member)

- 5.15 Indeed, following a number of meetings, Hubs developed a clearer understanding of the desired outcomes of the Hub and what could realistically be achieved to the benefit of members. As Hubs developed, it was clear that many of the planned activities outlined in their original action plans were no longer aligned to the shifting needs of the group, did not require any funding or, following additional research, were deemed too ambitious and therefore were not viable; for example, shared IT solutions.

- 5.16 This was exemplified by the experience of one Hub. When developing their action plan they tried to develop outcomes and related project activities that would benefit all members, and thus ensure that each local authority received an equal share of the funding. However, following a number of meetings it became clear that local authorities were operating in very different contexts and many of the projects outlined in the Hub's action plan were not viable. As a result, with hindsight, a member of this Hub felt that they should have made funding available to individual local authorities to take forward their own projects.

- 5.17 Those Hubs which met frequently were able to identify these issues, amend and update their action plans, and develop new ideas of how the unspent funding might be better used to benefit their members¹³.

¹³ Although, in some cases, Hubs decided that particular desired outcomes could be achieved without the need for funding.

- 5.18 However, those who had met less frequently felt that, by the time they had developed an understanding of how the Hub could benefit members, it was too late to make full use of the funding before 31st March 2012.
- 5.19 The short timescales for developing action plans were exacerbated by two additional factors:
- in many cases, this was the first time local authorities had come together so there was some degree of reticence to “put their cards on the table”, and speak openly and honestly with one another in the early stages. (The importance of trust and honesty to the success of Hubs process is discussed in more detail below).
 - some Hub members entered the Hubs process not convinced that housing options was an appropriate approach for their local authority, while others from local authorities who were at early stages in the development of the housing options approach did not have a clear understanding of the priorities of their local authority and, therefore, how the Hub could assist with that development. As their local authorities developed their thinking on housing options, they had a better idea of how the Hub could help with the development of the approach.

Membership of Hubs

- 5.20 Two factors related to the composition and membership of the Hub were identified as being important to the success of the Hub. These were:
- Hubs consisting of local authorities at different stages in the development of housing options
 - The ‘lead’ local authority being able to make time to carry out Hub activities.

Hubs of local authorities at different stages in the development of housing options

- 5.21 It was important to the success of Hubs that they were comprised of local authorities at different stages in developing housing options approaches. This ensured that Hub members could share best practice and experiences, and learn from members who were further ahead in the development of housing options.
- 5.22 This also meant that the success of the Hub process was reliant on a high degree of altruism among local authorities, particularly from those who were further ahead in their development of housing options, and a commitment to bring other local authorities up to the same level of development. However, by definition, this meant that the more advanced local authorities had considerably less to gain from being part of the Hub than others. In some of the cases, those local authorities who were further ahead were also ‘leads’ and, therefore, had to undertake much of the administration of their Hub.

These local authorities therefore, in many ways, spent a great deal of time and resource for the benefit of others.

5.23 As discussed in Chapter 3, at the outset of the process, the consensus among local authorities was to group Hubs on the basis of geography. It was accepted that this was the most logical way of organising the Hubs. In practical terms, grouping Hubs by geography was important for two reasons. First, it allowed local authorities to hold Hub meetings on a frequent basis should they have wished to do so, without incurring expense and excessive time away from their local authority. Second, it encouraged local authorities to develop relationships with neighbouring authorities, to and from where potential homeless client might migrate.

5.24 However, grouping Hubs by geography also meant that, by default, Hubs were made up of a range of local authorities at different stages in developing their housing options approaches. As one Hub member explained, if her Hub was made up of local authorities at the same stage as hers, they would “still be floundering around”.

if you're all complete novices it becomes very difficult to be able to translate what you might know is a theoretical thing into practice, whereas if somebody said, well this is the way we did it, it makes it much more real.

(Head of Service).

The ‘lead’ local authority being committed to the Hub

5.25 The commitment of ‘lead’ local authorities was important to the success of the Hub. Some ‘leads’ felt they were more of a facilitator for the Hub, rather than ‘mentor’. Evidence from Hubs suggested that the suitability and effectiveness of the ‘lead’ was reliant on them being fully committed to the process and making appropriate resources available to carry out Hub-related administrative tasks (in addition to their ‘day job’). ‘Leads’ played an important role in scheduling meetings, facilitating communication between members and ensuring the continuity of Hub activities.

5.26 In one of the Hubs, the ‘lead’ took on a mentoring role for other member authorities. Members of this Hub felt that it was important for their Hub to be led by the local authority with the most experience of housing options:

I think if you could identify somebody that would take a lead, I think that's crucial and if there is somebody who has an expertise or experience then I think that would be a huge advantage to setting up something like that, otherwise it is a bit of the blind leading the blind, kind of feeling your way along.

(Hub member)

5.27 However, while there were obvious benefits to local authorities who were part of a Hub led by a ‘mentor’ local authority, it was not deemed essential to the success of the Hubs process. Indeed, in other Hubs, the process worked just as effectively when the ‘lead’ did not adopt an overt mentoring role.

- 5.28 The importance of the 'lead' to the process, and specifically the need for them to commit sufficient time and resources to facilitate the Hub, was evidenced by the experience of the 'lead' authority in one Hub. The work of the Hub was not seen as a priority compared to other pressures within their local authority.

The inner workings of the Hub

- 5.29 There were a number of factors related to the day-to-day running of the Hub that were seen as being important to the success of the Hub. These were:
- trust, openness and honesty among members
 - having regular and frequent meetings
 - having administrative support
 - having committed members.

Trust, openness and honesty

- 5.30 A common view among Hub members was that the success of their Hub was founded on the development of trust between members. Trust encouraged members to be open and honest with each other about their local authority's progress and their concerns surrounding housing options – to "lay their cards on the table". This helped to facilitate the setting of clear aims for the Hub and was the foundation for sharing information and best practice. However, it took time (a number of meetings) to build this trust. One Hub spoke of how, over time, a "group feeling" emerged where members felt they were "all in it together".
- 5.31 The importance of trust was also highlighted as something that impacted upon the sharing of information with local authorities in other Hubs; for example, willingness to upload information to the communities of practice website. Indeed, one Hub member discussed how their Hub was reluctant to share information with other Hubs because they had not developed the same trust with members of other Hubs.

We are always really open... but I think the thing that is difficult about it is that trust thing, because [the Scottish Government] had asked about opening out the Hubs, and I said well there are things that we will say in this room, that we wouldn't say anywhere else, because we trust each other enough that that information is not going to go anywhere else. You can say silly things or come up with daft ideas, because we trust each other.

(Hub member).

Having regular and frequent meetings

- 5.32 It was central to the success of the approach that Hubs met frequently, particularly in the early stages. This ensured continuity of Hub activities. Those Hubs which met most frequently had developed quicker than those which had fewer meetings, in terms of: building trust between members, developing clear aims for the Hub (and overcoming the barriers of lack of

guidance and time in the initial stages), sharing best practice, and making progress towards the Hub's desired outcomes.

Take time over your action plan, but have regular meetings. I think the most important thing is scheduling your meetings in advance and make sure everybody can attend, because you lose focus of it...I think if you miss one or two meetings, you can very quickly lose the focus and lose the drive, so it's important to keep it up.

(Hub member)

- 5.33 The importance of meetings to the sharing of best practice was evidenced by the experience of one Hub which had a break of nine months between their first and second meetings. The initial meeting was focused on the development of the action plan and how the group would spend the funding. At the meeting, specific projects were delegated to individual members to take forward on behalf of the Hub. However, rather than schedule subsequent face-to-face meetings, members kept each other up-to-date on the progress of projects via email. While this approach helped the Hub take forward projects outlined in their original action plan, the members of the group did not benefit from learning about each other's housing options approaches in the same way that members of other Hubs which met more often did. Indeed, as this member of the group acknowledged, the Hub only began to feel the benefit of information sharing late in the process, after they had met for the third time:

I didn't have the feeling that we were getting anywhere in terms of the ideas exchanged, the information exchanged, but I think we needed to get to meet each other in the flesh more often to get that part of the process going. We are still at a very early stage in the lifecycle of the group for that part of the process, [because] for the most part so far it's been about spending that wee pot of money.

(Hub member)

- 5.34 Three factors prevented Hubs from meeting more often:

- holiday commitments prevented Hubs from meeting in the summer months when it was difficult to schedule dates when all members were available to attend. Hub members felt that the absence of meetings during this time affected the continuity and focus of the Hub
- one Hub could not meet more often due to the geographic spread of member authorities. Their inability to meet more often than every three months was identified as something that hindered their ability to share best practice and, in particular, revise their actions plans
- a number of representatives in one Hub found it difficult to allocate time to have more meetings due to conflicts with work commitments. For these participants, ongoing pressures within their local authority took priority over the Hub (although, members of this Hub had not benefited from sharing best practice).

Having administrative support

- 5.35 Administrative support was perceived to be essential to alleviate the workload of the 'lead' and ensure the continuity of the Hub.
- 5.36 As discussed above, two Hubs recruited external organisations to carry out administrative tasks: one brought in help at the very start of the process; while the other brought in assistance in November, having already had a series of meetings. One Hub utilised internal administrative support to assist with Hub-related tasks. The remaining two host/leads carried out tasks without any specific administrative support.
- 5.37 Lack of administrative support was identified as a significant barrier to the successful running of the Hub process. Without support, 'leads' found it difficult to manage the administration of the Hubs effectively on top of their 'day job' in their local authority. As a result, there were occasions when tasks – for example, organising meetings, sending communications, dealing with consultants, preparing minutes from meetings – were delayed, left until the last minute or had to be dealt with in meetings.
- 5.38 The level of administration work involved for 'leads', caused the Heads of Service of two of the 'lead' authorities to say that they should have been made aware of the extent of work that had to be carried out by the 'lead', so that they could have made more of an informed decision about taking on the responsibility and made sufficient resources available.
- 5.39 Hub 'leads' gave two reasons for not recruiting administrative support for their Hub:
- at the outset of the process, one was unsure about how their Hub should go about procuring support and wanted more guidance from the Scottish Government about how they should do this. By the time the Hub started meeting regularly enough to warrant some kind of support, it was felt to be too late to recruit assistance
 - one 'lead', who adopted a mentoring role with their Hub, was concerned that their Hub might lose focus if responsibility for facilitating the Hub was passed to an external agency.
- 5.40 With hindsight, those Hubs which did not recruit support, felt that their Hub should have arranged administrative support in one of two ways:
- a number of Hub members felt it would have been beneficial to the Hubs process if the Scottish Government had taken funding from each of the Hubs to commission an organisation to manage the administration of all Hubs
 - alternatively, they discussed how it would have been beneficial to have a formal arrangement within their Hub to share administrative tasks between members, rather than these being the sole responsibility of the 'lead' authority.

Having committed members

- 5.41 The success of the Hub was also reliant upon all members of the Hub being committed to the process by making efforts to attend Hub meetings and sharing the responsibility of carrying out action plan-related tasks. There were examples in all of the Hubs of action plan-related tasks being delegated to non-‘lead’ local authorities to take forward – for example, in one Hub, particular members had been identified as ‘experts’ in specific areas of interest for the Hub (such as training). This way of working helped to share responsibility across members and ensure the continuity of Hub activities. Further, it ensured that the process was not over-reliant on the ‘lead’ local authority:

we are all pretty much taking bits of responsibility for different pieces of work, but I think there is a real commitment to make the thing work on the basis of people taking responsibility for the thing....It's not a case of ['lead'] driving this thing and everybody is hanging on ['lead'], you know, with every bated breath. Everybody is pretty much rolling their sleeves up and getting the thing taken forward.

(Hub member)

- 5.42 However, this arrangement should not be seen as a replacement for holding regular meetings. As discussed above, one Hub, which took forward project activities without holding regularly meetings, did not benefit from the sharing of best practice in the same way as other Hubs.
- 5.43 The importance of sharing responsibility was evidenced by the views of one Head of Service, who felt that some members of their Hub were more committed than others. As a result, there was an over-reliance on the ‘lead’ authority to take forward the activities of the Hub:

... we are chairing the meetings, therefore, we are doing all the paperwork, we're organising all the meetings, doing most of the work involved in it...I think people quite like coming along to the meetings, but I don't genuinely feel there is an equal partnership involved in the Hub at present.

(Head of Service).

6 THE LIKELIHOOD OF HUBS CONTINUING

- 6.1 This chapter discusses the potential for Hubs to continue beyond 31st March 2012, the end of the current funding period. It focuses on three issues:
- interest among Hub members to continue their Hub
 - the ways in which Hubs could be developed to increase benefits to local authorities
 - the factors which may need to be addressed if Hubs were to continue.

Interest in Hubs continuing

- 6.2 There was a great deal of appetite among Hub members to continue beyond 31st March 2012. There was a feeling that much of the work of Hubs still had to be completed:
- they were still working towards their desired outcomes
 - some Hubs were only just beginning to get the full benefit of the Hub in terms of sharing best practice
 - they had plans to extend the membership of the Hub to include external organisations (see below for more details).
- 6.3 Furthermore, there was a perception that, as 'buy in' to the housing options approach increased, and local authorities continued to develop their approaches, members would benefit from continued sharing of best practice and joint learning:

...it would be particularly helpful to us because of the stage we're at. We're in the process of developing our plans for the housing options approach, [and] we will be implementing the pilot this year, so [we would like] to continue to have the support of the Hubs as this is a critical time for us.

(Head of Service).

Developing the current Hubs

- 6.4 Hubs are likely to continue in some form, at least in the short term, beyond 31st March 2012. Hub members identified two ways that the process could be developed to provide greater benefits for members:
- engaging external organisations in the Hubs process
 - increasing sharing between Hubs.

Engaging external organisations in the Hubs process

- 6.5 As described in Chapter 3, while three Hubs had invited other external organisations to join their Hub, all Hubs had ambitions to extend their membership in the future (to include, for example, Registered Social Landlords, private landlords and third sector agencies).
- 6.6 Hub members were in agreement that building partnerships with these organisations was crucial to delivering effective housing options services, by increasing the 'menu' of available options to clients in a local authority. While a number of local authorities had developed partnerships with external organisations at a local level, as part of the development of their own housing options approach, the Hub was seen as a potential platform in which to involve external organisations in the homelessness prevention agenda.

Increasing sharing between Hubs

- 6.7 The other potential way that Hubs could be developed would be to increase sharing between Hubs. As mentioned in Chapter 4, there was support for more opportunities to learn about activities that were being carried out in other Hubs. While the Scottish Government made efforts to facilitate sharing between Hubs, by creating the Communities of Practice website, the website was not widely used. Information sharing between Hubs was restricted largely to the national seminar event in August 2011 and attendance by Scottish Government representatives at a number of Hub meetings.
- 6.8 Hub members were keen for more regular and active sharing of information and experiences across Hubs. They felt this would benefit Hub members in the following ways:
- increasing the pool of best practice from which local authorities could learn
 - developing contacts and networks for learning in other areas, particularly with local authorities who were facing similar challenges
 - helping to generate ideas, particularly in relation to action plan development
 - increasing the benefit for local authorities further on the development of housing options by allowing them to learn from other advanced local authorities.
- 6.9 While recognising that ways of engaging between different Hubs were more problematic due to geography and cost, Hub members had a number of ideas about how information sharing across Hubs could be improved:
- holding more regular national meetings, which bring together local authorities from across the five Hubs
 - making the minutes from each Hub meeting available to other Hubs

- having an update on what other Hubs are doing as a standard agenda item at each Hub meeting. This could be assisted by information provided by the Scottish Government. One suggestion was for a Scottish Government representative to attend meetings and provide an update (as had been done on number of occasions). Alternatively, these updates could be provided via a Hubs newsletter.

Factors which may impact on Hubs continuing

- 6.10 As noted, there was appetite among Hub members for Hubs to continue. However, it was evident that two issues would need to be addressed for this to be considered. These were:
- the availability of funding
 - Hubs maintaining a clear purpose.

Availability of funding

- 6.11 Hub members wanted more clarity from the Scottish Government about the likelihood of funding being available to support the work of their Hub. Members felt that some level of funding was crucial to the continuation of their Hub. This was for three reasons.
- 6.12 First, as discussed in Chapter 4, funding was essential to one Hub to enable them to meet regularly. Without the availability of some funding, members did not believe they would be able to pay for travel from their own local authority's budget.
- 6.13 Second, given that the availability of some form of administrative support was seen as being very helpful, members felt that it was important to make some funding available for this purpose. Without this assistance, the responsibility for administration of the group would be placed back onto 'leads' and/or other Hub members.
- 6.14 Third, some Hub members felt that it was important for the Scottish Government to make some money available to fund Hub based ideas and activities. These members felt that the focus, and some of the benefits, of the Hub approach would be lost if they could not fund joint initiatives.

I think it will still exist as long as the government supports it. You know, it is one of those things when you got a goal in mind, you've got your funding, you've got your things you're working to and that's a driving force if that was to go, that might be different.
(Hub member).

- 6.15 Some Hub members said that their Hub would continue indefinitely, without any additional financial support. However, they did recognise that local authorities would have to incur the costs of the management and administration of the Hub. As a result, it was likely that Hubs would have to meet less often.

Maintaining a clear purpose

- 6.16 As noted in Chapter 5, one of the key success factors of Hubs was setting clear aims for the group, which were ultimately framed by the need for local authorities to meet the 2012 Target. While Hubs have a reason to continue in the short-term – they are still working towards achieving their desired outcomes and carrying out various projects (notably, activities to mitigate the impact of changes to housing benefit) – some Hub members had doubts as to whether there would be reason to continue in the longer term, when all the desired outcomes of the Hub and the 2012 Target had been met.
- 6.17 Therefore, if Hubs are going to continue, their purpose and aims would need to be restated. This may include their importance to the ongoing development of the housing options approach in all Scottish local authorities.

7 REPLICATING THE HUBS MODEL IN OTHER SERVICE AREAS

- 7.1 This evaluation has described how being part of a Hub can benefit a local authority in number of ways, including: helping to build confidence in and create 'buy in' to the housing options approach; providing reassurance on progress towards developing services; and learning through sharing best practice and carrying out joint projects. As a result, it is worth considering whether the model could be used to help local authority representatives in other service areas.
- 7.2 This chapter first considers whether Hub members and Heads of Service felt there would be merit in using the Hubs model in other service areas. It then concludes with best practice guidance on how the Hubs model could be best designed to meet the needs of local authorities in other service areas and ensure they receive maximum benefit from Hubs.

Wider applicability of Hubs

- 7.3 Hub members and Heads of Service felt that there could be value in rolling out the Hub approach, either to areas related to housing or in other service areas. They recognised that the principles of the approach – joint-working, and developing and sharing best practice – were very positive.
- 7.4 However, while they felt that many of these individual principles could be used in any service area, for the Hubs model itself to be valid and effective, it would need to be applied to an area where the challenges faced by local authorities are similar to those which prompted the development of the Hubs. These include: the implementation of a new service or policy initiative within a certain time period, or in order to meet a specified target; and differential levels of 'buy in' to, and implementation of, a new service or policy initiative across local authorities.
- 7.5 There were two examples given of potentially suitable service areas or upcoming challenges where the Hubs model might be used to benefit local authorities:
- within housing, one Hub member felt that the Hub model could assist local authorities with developing ways to make provisions to meet the Housing Support Assessment Duty
 - in social services, the Hub model could be used to help local authorities develop and implement services related to Self-Directed Support (SDS) reforms. The challenges faced by local authorities in implementing the legislation appear to mirror those of housing options: the legislation necessitates a culture change in the way that social care services are provided; local authorities are at different stages in developing approaches (a number of SDS 'test sites' have been created); and the effective delivery of services requires partnership working between internal departments and external organisations.
- 7.6 These examples are not intended to be an exhaustive list of service areas where the Hubs model could be applied. There may be a range of other

areas which might benefit from Hub working, which Hub members and Heads of Service were not aware of.

Best practice guidance

- 7.7 The evaluation is able to offer some insights into how the Hubs model could be best designed. The following measures should be taken to ensure maximum benefit is derived from the Hubs model:

During the setup 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.

ANNEX A: SCOPING INTERVIEWS WITH HUB 'LEADS' – TOPIC GUIDE

INTERNAL USE ONLY

11-010156-01 Evaluation of Homelessness Hubs Scoping interviews with lead local authority representatives Discussion Guide_Final

Introduction

Introduce self and Ipsos MORI

Thank participant for taking part, should take around 40 minutes.

Background: Ipsos MORI has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to carry out an evaluation of local authority housing hubs. In particular, we are keen to explore how well hubs are working to develop, promote and share good practice about the housing options approach.

Explain purpose of this discussion – the purpose of this interview is to get an idea of how your hub is organised and managed, at what stage of development it is at, and your views on how your hub has worked so far.

Inform participant that, as there are only a small number of hubs, we cannot assure complete anonymity when reporting the findings. However, your name will not be used. Advise that if there are any comments which they would like to withdraw then to say so and we will not include them in the report.

Obtain permission to record discussion.

Background about their role

I'd like to begin by asking a few questions about your current post?

What is your current job title?

How long have you worked a) in your current post for <COUNCIL>? and b) in housing?

What are your roles/responsibilities in your current post?

Background to Hub

Now I'd just like to ask you a few questions about the background to the introduction of housing hubs

What do you see as the main aims and objectives of the housing hubs approach?
PROBE AROUND HOUSING OPTIONS APPROACHES IF NECESSARY

How did you first find out that housing Hubs were going to be introduced?

What was your initial reaction to the decision to introduce housing hubs?

PROBE:

- Did you have any concerns?

What information or training did you receive about the housing hub approach at the start?

Why was <LOCAL AUTHORITY> chosen to be the lead/host for your hub?

PROBE:

- How do you feel about being the lead/host authority?

And how was the setup process?

PROBE:

- Were there any teething problems in setting up your hub?
- How were teething problems resolved?
- Was there anything that particularly helped at this stage?
- How was the Chief Executive or other senior officials in your council involved in the set up of the hub? [IF INVOLVED: What was the job title of the most senior person involved?]

Structure and working arrangements of hubs

Can you tell me a bit about how your hub works in practice?

PROBE:

- Do you meet face to face?
- How regularly do you meet?
- Who attends the meetings?
- What is discussed?
- How is the information from the meetings disseminated, if at all?
- Who is the information disseminated to?

Do members also have more informal contact?

PROBE:

- How does this contact take place? [Face to face; Email; telephone; CoP Website]
- How frequent is it?
- What is discussed?
- Does this involve all or only some local authorities in your hub?

Do hub members communicate via the Communities of Practice website?

PROBE:

- IF YES: How frequently?
- For what kind of things?
- IF NO: Why do you not use it?

Are all hub members people who do similar jobs to you in other local authorities?

Are your hub's members at a similar stage in implementing the housing options approach?

PROBE:

- How has this impacted on the way your hub works?

What are the funding arrangements in place for your hub?

PROBE:

- Have the current funding arrangements had any impact on how your hub operates?

Action Plans

Could you tell me a bit about how the action plan for your hub was drawn up?

PROBE:

- Were all members in agreement about what the priorities of the action plan should be?

Being the lead/host local authority, do you have responsibility for ensuring the action plan is delivered?

PROBE:

- How are the tasks required to achieve action plans delegated among hub members?
- How will you make sure the plan is delivered?

Are you confident that your hub can meet the targets set out in your action plan?

PROBE:

- What barriers exist that might prevent this?

It is our understanding that hubs are required to report to the Scottish Government on their progress towards meeting actions plans. How are you planning to do this?

PROBE:

- How regularly is your hub planning to do this?
- How will you report?
- Who will report?

Benefits of Hub Working

Has the hub approach helped members implement the housing options approach?

Has it made implementing housing options more difficult for any local authorities?

So far, do you think all of the local authorities in your hub have worked together well?

PROBE:

- why do you think this has happened?
- have all local authorities in your hub embraced the housing hub approach?
- have there been any barriers to working together?
- how have differences of opinion been resolved?
- has anything helped working together?

Can you suggest anything that would improve the way that your hub is managed?

Do you have any examples of when local authorities *within* your hub have shared good practice with other members?

Has your hub shared information with *other* hubs?

PROBE:

- Should information be shared between hubs?
- Is there a mechanism to do this?
- What barriers exist to successful information sharing with other hubs?

From what you know, how does your hub compare to those operating elsewhere in Scotland?

PROBE:

- Is your hub more or less developed?

Monitoring data and further research

I'd like to talk a little bit about monitoring. Clearly, it is still very early days for the hub, so some of this might be about what you are going to do rather than what you have done already...

What has been done/what is planned for ongoing monitoring in relation to:

- progress towards meeting the aims set out in the action plans?
- success in implementing the housing options approach?
- preventing homelessness in your area?

Have the Scottish Housing Best Value Network been involved so far?

- What involvement/discussions have you had with them?
- How is that progressing?

How is the process of bench-marking/building a 'baseline' position going?

- How close to having a 'baseline' picture do you think the hub members are?
- Do you have any issues/concerns about benchmarking and ongoing monitoring?

And, at this stage, how do you see statistics being collated by hub members and shared across the hub in future?

One of the elements of evaluation involves looking at local authority's monitoring data on homelessness and housing options. Who would be the best person to talk to in your department about accessing this data?

We also plan to carry out further research with each of the hub representatives – either as a focus group or a series of individual depth interviews. If it was a focus group, we would, ideally, schedule it to coincide with when you are meeting and would also observe the meeting if possible. This can be anytime between June and November. Do you have a meeting scheduled during this time?

Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

PROBE:

- Anything about your hub that you feel is important but we haven't discussed?

Thank and close.

ANNEX B: FOCUS GROUPS WITH HUB MEMBERS – TOPIC GUIDE

INTERNAL USE ONLY

11-010156-01 Evaluation of Homelessness Hubs Qual with local authority representatives Discussion Guide for Focus Groups_FINAL

Introduction

Introduce self and Ipsos MORI

Thank participants for taking part, should take just over 1 hour.

Background: Ipsos MORI has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to carry out an evaluation of local authority housing hubs. In particular, we are keen to explore how well hubs are working to develop, promote and share good practice about the housing options approach.

Explain purpose of this discussion – the purpose of this focus group is to get your views on how you think your hub has worked so far, how it helping your local authority to implement housing options, and how hub working could be improved.

We will be speaking to all 32 Local Authority representatives. It's very important that they are as open and honest as possible so the research reflects how hubs are working in practice, what's working well, what's working less well etc.

Assure confidentiality/anonymity - Inform participants that, as there are only a small number of hubs, we cannot assure complete anonymity when reporting the findings. However, your name will not be used. Advise that if there are any comments which they would like to withdraw then to say so and we will not include them in the report.

Obtain permission to record discussion.

[NOTE: THE WARMUP MIGHT NOT BE REQUIRED DEPENDING ON THE FORMAT OF THE PRECEEDING MEETING]

Warm-up

To begin please can each person introduce themselves saying which organisation or council they work for, how long they have been in their current post, and how long they have worked in housing?

Background to Hub (5 minutes)

I'd just like to begin with a discussion about the background to the introduction of your housing hubs

What do you see as the main aims and objectives of the housing hubs approach?

PROBE AROUND HOUSING OPTIONS APPROACHES IF NECESSARY.

[INTERVIEWER TO NOTE RESPONSES ON FLIPCHART]

When you first heard about the hub approach, what were your main expectations of how it could help your local authority?

[INTERVIEWER TO NOTE RESPONSES ON FLIPCHART]

Perceptions of the structure and working arrangements of hubs (20 minutes)

I'd now like to discuss how you feel the hub approach has worked so far

In general, how do you think it's going?

PROBE ON ANY ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED

[INTERVIEWER TO REFER BACK TO EXPECTATIONS] **So far, have your expectations of how the hub approach could help your local authority been met?**

PROBE:

- Why has that particular expectation not been met?
- Have there been any other benefits or problems that you did not expect?

Overall, what are the main benefits of being in a hub?

What does your hub do well?

PROBE:

- Any particular strengths?

PROBE ON ISSUES MENTIONED

And what could your hub do better?

PROBE:

- Any particular weaknesses?

PROBE ON ISSUES MENTIONED

What problems have been faced by your hub?

PROBE:

- How did these arise?
- How were these resolved?

Do you think the way in which local authorities have been grouped into hubs is appropriate?

PROBE:

- Does the number of local authorities in your hub work well?
- Does the geographical spread work well?

Communication (5 minutes)

How did you interact with other local authorities before hubs were introduced?

PROBE:

- In what ways does the hub approach differ?

What formal contact does your hub have?

PROBE:

- How useful is this contact?

- What is discussed?
- Would you like more or less of this kind of contact with hub members?
- How could it be improved?

Do you also have more informal contact?

PROBE:

- How does this contact take place? [Face to face; Email; telephone; CoP Website]
- What is discussed?
- Does this involve all or only some local authorities in the hub?
- How useful is this contact?
- Would you like more or less informal contact with hub members?

Do you communicate via the Communities of Practice website?

PROBE:

- IF YES: How frequently?
- For what kind of things?
- IF NO: Why do you not use it?
- Would you like to use it more?
- How else would you like to use it?
- How could the website be improved?

Progress towards implementing housing options (10 minutes)

I'd now like to briefly discuss housing options

How has the way in which you deal with homelessness presentations changed in recent years?

- What difficulties has your local authority faced?

What housing options are available to users?

PROBE:

- How does this differ across different users?
- What factors influence decisions on what options to recommend?

Are you all at a similar stage in implementing the housing options approach?

PROBE:

- Does this matter?

The role of hubs in facilitating housing options (15 minutes)

One of the main reasons hubs were introduced was to encourage a culture change among local authorities in the way they deal with homelessness presentations

In what ways has the hub approach helped to bring about this 'culture change'?

Has the hub approach helped you implement the housing options approach?

PROBE FOR:

- How has it helped?
- has it helped raise awareness and knowledge of housing options?
- has it helped improve access to sources to support and advice?

Has the hub approach made implementing housing options more difficult for any of you?

Do you have any examples of when local authorities *within* your hub have shared good practice with other members about issues relating to *housing options*?

PROBE FOR EXAMPLES

Do you have any examples of when local authorities *within* your hub have shared good practice with other members about *other issues*?

PROBE FOR EXAMPLES

Has your hub shared information and good practice with *other* hubs?

PROBE:

- Should information be shared between hubs?
- Is there a mechanism to do this?
- What barriers exist to prevent successful information sharing with other hubs?

Are you confident that your local authority can meet the 2012 target?

PROBE:

- What might prevent this?

And, overall, what difference do you feel being part of a hub has made beyond what would happen anyway?

The involvement of other individuals/organisations (5 minutes)

How has the Chief Executive, other senior officials or elected members in your council/organisation been involved in the hub?

How have other people in local authority been involved in the hub?

PROBE:

- Who has been involved?
- In which ways is it used by colleagues in your local authority?

Have any other organisations been involved in offering your hub guidance and support?

PROMPT: Scottish Government; Scottish Housing Best Value Network; Any other organisations/partners

FOR EACH ORGANISATION PROBE:

- How have they been involved so far?
- Would you like them to be more/less involved?
- How has this involvement benefited the hub?

Action Plans (5 minutes)

How did you decide on what to include in your action plan?

PROBE:

- Was this an easy or difficult thing to do?

Where there any issues deciding on how the funding should be used?

PROBE:

- How did you prioritise the different needs of members?

How have the tasks required to achieve action plans been delegated among hub members?

Has your action plan changed?

PROBE:

- Are you allowed to change it?
- In hindsight, would you have done anything differently?

Are you confident that your hub can meet the targets set out in your action plan?

PROBE:

- What might prevent this?

Hub working in the future (10 minutes)

In the future, what changes do you plan to make to the way your hub is organised?

PROBE FOR SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

How do you feel about your hub being extended beyond 2012?

PROBE:

- What do you think would be the main benefits of extending your hub?
- What do you think would be the main difficulties/challenges in extending your hub?

And how do you feel about hub working being rolled-out into other service areas within your council?

PROBE:

- What do you think would be the main difficulties/challenges in rolling out hubs into other service areas?

What advice would you give to colleagues in other service areas who were looking to set up a hub?

Overall, what are the main aspects that are crucial to make a hub work?

Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

PROBE:

- Anything about your hub that you feel is important but we haven't discussed?

Thank and close.

ANNEX C: TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH HUB MEMBERS – TOPIC GUIDE

INTERNAL USE ONLY

11-010156-01 Evaluation of Homelessness Hubs Qual with local authority representatives Discussion Guide for telephone depth interviews_FINAL

Introduction

Introduce self and Ipsos MORI

Thank participant for taking part, should take around 1 hour.

Background: Ipsos MORI has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to carry out an evaluation of local authority housing hubs. In particular, we are keen to explore how well hubs are working to develop, promote and share good practice about the housing options approach.

Explain purpose of this discussion – the purpose of this interview is to get your views on how you think your hub has worked so far, how it helping your local authority to implement housing options, and how hub working could be improved.

We will be speaking to all 32 Local Authority representatives. It's very important that they are as open and honest as possible so the research reflects how hubs are working in practice, what's working well, what's working less well etc.

Assure confidentiality/anonymity - Explain that other hub members will not be told what they say. Inform participant that, as there are only a small number of hubs, we cannot assure complete anonymity when reporting the findings. However, your name will not be used. Advise that if there are any comments which they would like to withdraw then to say so and we will not include them in the report.

Obtain permission to record discussion.

Warm-up (1 minute)

I'd like to begin by asking a few questions about your current post?

What is your current job title?

How long have you worked a) in your current post for <COUNCIL>? and b) in housing?

What are your roles/responsibilities in your current post?

Background to Hub (5 minutes)

What do you see as the main aims and objectives of the housing hubs approach?
PROBE AROUND HOUSING OPTIONS APPROACHES IF NECESSARY.

What was your initial reaction to the decision to introduce housing hubs?

PROBE:

- Did you have any concerns?

What were your main expectations of how the hub approach could help your local authority?

How do you feel about [Local authority] being chosen as the lead/host for your hub?

Perceptions of the structure and working arrangements of hubs (15 minutes)

I'd now like to discuss how you feel the hub approach has worked so far

In general, how do you think it's going?

PROBE ON ANY ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED

So far, have your expectations of how the hub approach could help your local authority been met?

PROBE:

- Why has that particular expectation not been met?
- Have there been any other benefits or problems that you did not expect?

Overall, what are the main benefits of being in a hub?

What does your hub do well?

PROBE:

- Any particular strengths?

PROBE ON ISSUES MENTIONED

Do you think all of the local authorities in your hub have worked together well?

PROBE:

- why do you think this has happened?
- have all local authorities in your hub embraced the housing hub approach?
- have there been any barriers to working together?
- how have differences of opinion been resolved?

And what could your hub do better?

PROBE:

- Any particular weaknesses?

PROBE ON ISSUES MENTIONED

Can you suggest anything that would improve the way that your hub is managed?

What problems have been faced by your hub?

PROBE:

- How did these arise?
- How were these resolved?

Do you think the way in which local authorities have been grouped into hubs is appropriate?

PROBE:

- Does the number of local authorities in your hub work well?
- Does the geographical spread work well?

Communication (5 minutes)

How did you interact with other local authorities before hubs were introduced?

PROBE:

- In what ways does the hub approach differ?

What formal contact does your hub have?

PROBE:

- How useful is this contact?
- What is discussed?
- Would you like more or less of this kind of contact with hub members?
- How could it be improved?

Do you also have more informal contact?

PROBE:

- How does this contact take place? [Face to face; Email; telephone; CoP Website]
- What is discussed?
- Does this involve all or only some local authorities in the hub?
- How useful is this contact?
- Would you like more or less informal contact with hub members?

Do you communicate via the Communities of Practice website?

PROBE:

- IF YES: How frequently?
- For what kind of things?
- IF NO: Why do you not use it?
- How else would you like to use it?
- How could the website be improved?

Progress towards implementing housing options (5 minutes)

I'd now like to briefly discuss housing options

At what stage is your local authority in developing your housing options approach?

How has the way in which you deal with homelessness presentations changed in recent years?

- What difficulties has your local authority faced?

What housing options are available to users?

PROBE:

- How does this differ across different users?
- What factors influence decisions on what options to recommend?

Are all members in your hub at a similar stage in implementing the housing options approach?

PROBE:

- Does this matter?

The role of hubs in facilitating housing options (15 minutes)

One of the main reasons hubs were introduced was to encourage a culture change among local authorities in the way they deal with homelessness presentations

In what ways has the hub approach helped to bring about this ‘culture change’?

Has the hub approach helped you implement the housing options approach?

PROBE FOR:

- IF YES:
 - How has it helped?
 - Has it helped raise awareness and knowledge of housing options?
 - Has it helped improve access to sources to support and advice?
- IF NO: has it made it more difficult for you?

Do you have any examples of when local authorities *within* your hub have shared good practice with other members about issues relating to *housing options*?

PROBE FOR EXAMPLES

Do you have any examples of when local authorities *within* your hub have shared good practice with other members about *other issues*?

PROBE FOR EXAMPLES

Has your hub shared information and good practice with *other* hubs?

PROBE:

- Should information be shared between hubs?
- Is there a mechanism to do this?
- What barriers exist to prevent successful information sharing with other hubs?

What barriers exist to successful information sharing with other hubs?

Are you confident that your local authority can meet the 2012 target?

PROBE:

- What might prevent this?

And, overall, what difference do you feel being part of a hub has made beyond what would happen anyway?

The involvement of other individuals/organisations (5 minutes)

How has the Chief Executive, other senior officials or elected members in your council/organisation been involved in the hub?

How have other people in local authority been involved in the hub?

PROBE:

- In which ways is it used by colleagues in your local authority?

Have any other organisations been involved in offering your hub guidance and support?

PROMPT: Scottish Government; Scottish Housing Best Value Network; Any other organisations/partners

FOR EACH ORGANISATION PROBE:

- How have they been involved so far?
- Would you like them to be more/less involved?
- How has this involvement benefited the hub?

Action Plans (5 minutes)

How did you decide on what to include in your action plan?

PROBE:

- Was this an easy or difficult thing to do?

Where there any issues deciding on how the funding should be used?

PROBE:

- How did you prioritise the different needs of members?

How have the tasks required to achieve action plans been delegated among hub members?

Has your action plan changed?

PROBE:

- Are you allowed to change it?
- In hindsight, would you have done anything differently?

Are you confident that your hub can meet the targets set out in your action plan?

PROBE:

- What might prevent this?

Hub working in the future (10 minutes)

In the future, what changes do you plan to make to the way your hub is organised?

How do you feel about your hub being extended beyond 2012?

PROBE:

- What do you think would be the main benefits of extending your hub?
- What do you think would be the main difficulties/challenges in extending your hub?

And how do you feel about hub working being rolled-out into other service areas with your council?

PROBE:

- What do you think would be the main difficulties/challenges in rolling out hubs into other service areas?

What advice would you give to colleagues in other service areas who were looking to set up a hub?

Overall, what are the main aspects that are crucial to make a hub work?

Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

PROBE:

- Anything about your hub that you feel is important but we haven't discussed?

Thank and close.

ANNEX D: TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH HEADS OF SERVICE – TOPIC GUIDE

INTERNAL USE ONLY

11-010156-01 Evaluation of Homelessness Hubs Qual with local authority Heads of Service Discussion Guide for telephone interviews_Final

Introduction

Introduce self and Ipsos MORI

Thank participant for taking part, should take around 30 minutes.

Background: Ipsos MORI has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to carry out an evaluation of local authority housing hubs. In particular, we are keen to explore how well hubs are working to develop, promote and share good practice about the housing options approach.

Explain purpose of this discussion – the purpose of this interview is to get your views on the hub approach, how you think it is helping your local authority to implement housing options, and how hub working could be improved.

We have been speaking to all 32 Local Authority representatives. We are speaking to a sample of Heads of Service to explore their views on the hubs process.

Please be as open and honest as possible so the research reflects how hubs are working in practice, what's working well, what's working less well etc.

Assure confidentiality/anonymity - Explain that other hub members will not be told what they say. Inform participant that, as there are only a small number of hubs, we cannot assure complete anonymity when reporting the findings. However, your name will not be used. Advise that if there are any comments which they would like to withdraw then to say so and we will not include them in the report.

Obtain permission to record discussion.

Warm-up (1 minute)

I'd like to begin by asking a couple of questions about your current post?

How long have you worked a) in your current post for <COUNCIL>? and b) in housing?

What are your roles/responsibilities in your current post?

Background to Hub (3 minutes)

When did you first hear about the housing hubs approach?

What was your initial reaction to the decision to introduce housing hubs?

PROBE:

- Did you have any concerns?

What do you see as the main aims and objectives of the housing hubs approach?

PROBE AROUND HOUSING OPTIONS APPROACHES IF NECESSARY.

What were your main expectations of how the hub approach could help your local authority?

How do you feel about [Local authority] being chosen as the lead/host for your hub?

How do you feel the hub approach has been generally received?

PROBE:

- Have any local authorities/organisations been more positive or negative than others?

Involvement of senior staff/other organisations (5 minutes)

How, if at all, have you and other senior officials or elected members in your council/organisation been involved in the hub so far?

PROBE:

- Do you think you/senior official should be more/less involved?
- Do you expect to have more/less involvement in the future?

IF NOT MENTIONED ABOVE: **How, if at all, were you involved in the set up of the hubs approach?**

PROBE:

- Would you have liked more or less involvement?

And so far, how have other members of the housing team been involved in the hub?

PROBE:

- In which ways do they get involved?
- Do you expect them to get involved more in the future

How, if at all, is information from the hub shared with other staff in your local authority?

PROBE:

- Do you think more could be done to share information from the hub?

From what you know, how have other organisations been involved in supporting the hub approach? PROMPT: Scottish Government; Housing Associations/RSLs in your area; Third Sector; Any other organisations/partners

FOR EACH ORGNISATION PROBE:

- How have they been involved so far?
- Would you like them to be more/less involved?

The role of hubs in encouraging a 'culture change' (12 minutes)

READ OUT: *One of the main reasons hubs were introduced was to encourage a culture change among local authorities in the way they deal with homelessness presentations*

Would you say there has been a culture change in the way your local authority deals with homelessness presentations?

PROBE FOR DETAIL/ EXAMPLES OF WHAT HAS CHANGED:

Had the culture change started before the implementation of the hub?

PROBE

- What factors helped to bring about the culture change?

Has the hub approach helped to bring about this 'culture change'?

PROBE FOR DETAIL/ EXAMPLES OF HOW IT HAS HELPED

What impact, if any, has the hub approach had on practical working arrangements in your department?

PROMPT EACH:

- Resourcing [IF HAD AN IMPACT, PROBE: How has this been managed?]
- Training

Has the hub approach helped your local authority implement the housing options approach?

PROBE FOR:

- IF YES:
 - How has it helped?
 - Has it helped raise awareness and knowledge of housing options?
 - Has it helped improve access to sources to support and advice?
- IF NO: has it made it more difficult for you?

Have you changed your plans for implementing housing options as a result of the hub?

PROBE IF YES:

- In what ways did the plans change?

READ OUT: *The Scottish Government allocated a total of £500k 'enabling funding' for the five hubs to spend.*

What do think about how your hub has spent its allocation?

Do you feel there should have been more or less funding?

Do you feel that resources allocated to the hubs could have been used more effectively?

Overall, what difference do you feel being part of a hub has made beyond what would have happened in your local authority anyway?

Hub working in the future (10 minutes)

As you may know, the funding for the hubs has been confirmed up until the end of March 2012.

How do you feel about your hub being extended beyond March 2012?

PROBE:

- What do you think would be the main benefits of extending your hub?
- What do you think would be the main difficulties/challenges in extending your hub?

Do you feel there would be any benefits to rolling out the hub approach to other service areas within your council?

PROBE:

- Are there any service areas in which you think it would work particularly well?

- And are there any service areas that you think would not be suitable for a hub approach?

And what particular aspects of the hub approach would be of benefit to other service areas?

PROBE ASPECTS:

- partnership working/building relationships with other local authorities
- shared learning
- enabling funding
-
- Any other aspects that participant mentioned in previous discussion

Has there been any interest in the hub approach from other departments/senior managers?

PROBE:

- Has it been discussed in meetings you've had with senior colleagues

What do you think would be the main difficulties/challenges in rolling out the hub approach into other service areas?

What concerns, if any, would you have about hub approach being rolled-out into other service areas?

What advice would you give to colleagues in other service areas who were looking to set up a hub?

PROBE:

- what aspects of hub working would you retain?
- what aspects would you change?

Overall, what are the main aspects that are crucial to make a hub work?

Is there anything else that you'd like to say?

PROBE:

- Anything about your hub that you feel is important but we haven't discussed?

Thank and close.

ANNEX E: TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL AUTHORITY DATA REPRESENTATIVES – TOPIC GUIDE

Data scoping interviews with LA staff - Topic Guide

Introduction

The first thing to point out, before we start our discussion, is that the work that I'm undertaking with Ipsos MORI is part of an independent evaluation that has been commissioned by the Scottish Government. I'll take full notes of the interview and use quotes from individuals to reflect the views of local authority staff but no individual views will be attributed - everything you say is anonymous.

At this stage, we know that the Hub approach is still very much under development. I've read over the Action Plans and see lots of activity going on and planned, relating to identifying training needs, staff training, sharing expertise, joint procurement of consultancy and the development of monitoring frameworks etc. The purpose of this interview is to get some sense of where data and monitoring sit within your current work, what is planned and what hurdles there might be to get where you want to be.

Roles and responsibilities

What role do you have within the local authority? Where is the Housing Options work 'sitting' at the moment? Is that within the Homelessness service or somewhere else? Does a department have responsibility for it or is it shared across different people/divisions? Who tends to go to the Hub meetings? How is that working out?

Who within the organisation is currently involved in monitoring/performance reporting? Who looks after management performance data on rent arrears, voids, tenancy? Who looks after HL1/HL2 reporting? (In transfer LAs we'll need to amend this to exclude housing management data)

Data systems

At the moment, how is information about homeless case files held? Is it on paper or electronic files? If on electronic files, does that system 'talk' to the Housing Management data? If not, what information is carried over to the HM data when a homeless allocation is made? (In Transfer LAs) How is data transferred from the Homelessness section to the housing provider - what data/information is carried across?

Reporting and using data

What sort of reporting (if any) do you do from the homelessness case data? Just HL1/HL2 or other data? How often is that done? Who uses that data?

How well does it work - is it fairly systematic/automatic? Are there standard reports? Are there any frustrations?

Recording housing support and prevention activities

If someone gets housing support or another type of referral, or information or advice, is that flagged/recorded in the case-file? What sort of activities would be logged in the case-file? Is that done using a standard form?

How is it recorded when the client is a homeless applicant? Is this different when the client does not make an application?

Would any record be made of activities being done - advice, information, sign-posting, etc. where no application is made? Would that person be recorded as potentially homeless or something else?

How consistent do you think staff are in their recording? Is activity being 'lost' from reporting/recording?

Data aspirations

Where would you like to be, data/monitoring-wise, in 12 months time? In 5 years? What is likely to affect progress? What resource issues/barriers are there?

How does your organisation's monitoring and data experience or 'ethos' fit into the Hub's Action Plan? Do you feel ahead or behind others in the Hub? Is anyone in the Hub taking the lead on monitoring data?

Do you feel you (and your staff) have the skills you need to record and monitor activity? What kind of help/support/insights might be useful to get? What sort of monitoring are you aware of being developed elsewhere?

Has the Hub discussed benchmarking/monitoring yet? How far is there agreement on the approach? What plans are in place for future monitoring?

Current benchmarking

Are you receiving support from anyone outside of the Hub to help to design your monitoring framework? Is that something you might do in future?

What about other housing benchmarking data? Are you involved in the Scottish Housing Best Value Network? Or any other benchmarking?

Is there anything else you'd like to say, about monitoring homeless prevention, the Hubs or anything else?

ANNEX F: DRAFT HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION PRO-FORMA

Homelessness Statistics: Draft Homelessness Prevention Proforma: For discussion

This return aims to gather information on households whose homelessness has been prevented.

Return for quarter ending:-

--

Total number of cases where positive action was successful in preventing homelessness during the quarter

0

Of which:

(A) Homelessness prevented - household able to remain in existing home as a result of:

- 1. Mediation using external or internal trained family mediators
- 2. Conciliation including home visits for family/ friend threatened exclusions.
- 3. Direct financial assistance.
- 4. Provision of independent financial advice.
- 5. Resolving housing benefit problems.
- 6. Resolving rent or service charge arrears in private rented sector.
- 7. Resolving rent or service charge arrears in social sector.
- 7. Sanctuary scheme measures for domestic violence.
- 8. Crisis intervention - providing emergency support.
- 9. Negotiation or legal advocacy to ensure that household can remain in private rented accommodation.
- 10. Providing other assistance that will enable the household to remain in accommodation in private rented or social sector.
- 11. Mortgage arrears interventions or mortgage rescue.
- 12. Other. (Please specify in notes below)

Total cases able to remain in existing home

0

(B) Homelessness prevented - household assisted to obtain alternative accommodation in the form of:

- 1. Any form of hostel or House in Multiple Accommodation with or without support.
- 2. Private rented sector accommodation with landlord incentive scheme.
- 3. Private rented sector without landlord incentive scheme
- 4. Accommodation arranged with friends or relatives.
- 5. Supported accommodation.
- 6. Social housing - managed move of an existing social housing tenant.
- 7. Social housing - nomination to housing association
- 9. Low Cost Home Ownership scheme
- 10. Other. (Please specify in notes)

Total cases assisted to obtain alternative accommodation.

0

Total number of cases where positive action was unsuccessful in preventing homelessness during the quarter

0

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