

S

PROPOSAL FOR HOUSING ADVICE AUDIT ON BEHALF OF THE LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

The proposal is to carry out an audit of the work of the five voluntary sector agencies providing housing advice and assistance in the London Borough of Brent.

The audit will have two separate parts.

1. Homelessness Prevention Contract

The auditors will select a number of cases from the spreadsheets provided by the agencies. As it is intended to seek consent from each of the service users for the audit and tracing process (see below), about 35/40 cases will be selected from each spreadsheet in the hope that a minimum sample of 25 per agency can be obtained. The selection will be made in an attempt to provide a sample with a mixture of household types and causes of threatened homelessness.

The purpose of the audit is firstly to assess the quality of advice using similar methodology to that outlined in Section 2. Secondly, a note will be made of the client details and the Council's Housing Resource records will be checked to ascertain whether a homeless presentation has been made and temporary accommodation provided for each case. If no such accommodation provision has been made then this will be taken to validate that prevention has taken place.

As soon as this part of the exercise has been completed, the name and other identifiers will be destroyed by the auditors and not passed on to the Council in the report or by any other means.

2. Audit of main contracted providers

A further audit will be carried out on a sample of 35/40 case files at the offices of the two main contracted providers, Brent Citizens Advice Bureau and Brent Community Law Centre.

The file review to be carried out will be a Peer Review exercise, now generally accepted by all, including the Legal Services Commission, as the only tried and tested method of assessing the Quality of advice and related work itself, rather than proxy tests which concentrate on the processes involved. It is similar in form to class assessment reviews used by Ofsted.

Appendix 1

Each housing advice case will be reviewed against ten quality criteria as follows:

1. Were the users needs and wishes clearly stated?
2. Was the user given an objective analysis/diagnosis of the problem?
3. Was the style of casework effective and appropriate?
4. Was the advice given legally and otherwise accurate?
5. Was the user given an explanation of all options available and did the adviser cover all aspects of the case?
6. Was the advice realistic and appropriate to the problem and to what extent were the user's needs met as a result?
7. Had the basic details of the service user been properly recorded at the outset? Including name, contact address/phone, household composition, source of income or any special circumstances.
8. Had the tenure of the user been noted? If not was there a clear note as to why tenure was not identified?
9. Were the basic details of the problem noted at the start and was there a clear note of what (if any) action was to be taken and by whom?
10. Was the file in tidy order and case notes clear and properly dated and initialled?

The files will be selected at random, subject to the following: that a representative sample of all advisers' work is included; that the sample covers the breadth of the work undertaken by the team; and that the files have either been 'completed' or show sufficient work in progress for an objective assessment to be made.

Report

An overall report will be produced describing the main findings of the audit and any overall trends, strengths and weaknesses.

The report will make recommendations where appropriate for consideration by the London Borough of Brent and the two agencies.

These may include recommendations for changes in practice or procedure; any identified training needs and examples of good practice.

Confidentiality

Shelter will conduct the audit on a fully confidential basis. Information will be sought only for the purposes of assisting internal quality control and training assessment needs and practices.

No information about members of the public, staff of other agencies, or agency staff or practices gained during the audit will be passed, by any means, to any other member of Shelter staff, or any other person except with the express permission of the London Borough of Brent and the two agencies.

Data Protection Act 1998

Notes made during file audit will be recorded on an anonymous basis without any reference to identifiable details of the service user. For the purpose of verification the file reference number will be noted.

The auditors

John Stevenson – Quality Manager

John Stevenson is currently Shelter's national Quality manager. He has worked in housing advice for 26 years as adviser, centre manager and in various casework support and management posts for Shelter.

He has in his current post for Shelter been responsible for developing Quality Standards and audits of Shelter funded centres, and has carried out audits for other bodies including local authorities.

He was a member of the Lord Chancellors Department Quality Task Force, responsible for developing and setting quality standards and systems for the three-tier Quality Mark for the Community Legal Service which was launched in April 2000.

Bill Palmer – Deputy Quality Manager

Bill Palmer has been involved in advice work for 20 years. He has held a number of posts in Shelter, including Caseworker, Fieldworker, Policy Officer and Manager of the ODPM funded National Homelessness Advice Service. He is now Shelter's Deputy Quality Manager.

Mathew Cunningham – Quality Officer

Mathew Cunningham has 13 years experience of working in housing; having spent 8 years with Plymouth City Council, working in diverse roles across all aspects of its housing service. His experience of working within a local authority Best Value environment has been complemented by 3 years as a caseworker for Shelter.

Cost of audit

Initial liaison, information gathering, sample selection etc.	2 days	
On-site audits of prevention advice	4 days	
On-site audits of main providers	4 days	
Collation of results, analysis and report writing	4 days	
14 days @ £400	=	£5600 excl. VAT
plus reasonable travel and subsistence costs		

SHELTER QUALITY TEAM

**Oakgate Chambers
Taunton
Somerset TA1 4EP**

01823 354993

quality@shelter.org.uk