



TACKLING HOMELESSNESS TOGETHER:

A study of nine housing-related voluntary projects
supported by Church Urban Fund

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On behalf of Church Urban Fund and Housing Justice

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1. INTRODUCTION

'Big Society' rather than 'Big Government' is a core theme of the Coalition Government. The emphasis is on enabling and empowering local communities to tackle local issues and decide local priorities. The small voluntary, church-based projects that the Church Urban Fund (CUF) supports are examples of this approach – examples which pre-date the political popularity of the idea. They are about a local church community seeing a problem and deciding to do something about it – in many cases with amazing results. Ironically, at time when the Government is keen to promote such local responses to local issues, some of the projects are under threat from Government cuts, notwithstanding protestations about protecting the vulnerable.

This study, sponsored jointly by Housing Justice (HJ) and the Church Urban Fund, has looked at a sample of housing-related projects supported by CUF to:

- understand how churches and other faith-based groups are responding to issues in their local community
- highlight some of the housing issues that these groups are seeking to address;
- identify any barriers that prevent such groups having a bigger impact; and,
- advise on how the issues of concern can be presented more effectively to local and central government.¹

APPROACH

The study has been carried out on a voluntary basis by Neil McDonald who was until March 2011 Director, Housing Management, Homelessness and Support at the Department for Communities and Local Government. He chose to take early retirement to enable him to contribute more directly on key issues in the housing and planning, free from the constraints that go with being a senior civil servant.

Neil visited nine CUF-supported projects in contrasting areas from the North East to the South West, on three occasions being accompanied by representatives from CUF and HJ. He also had access to CUF's files on the projects and financial and other information supplied by the projects. Following the completion of the visits, Neil has had the benefit of discussing the issues arising at roundtable organised by HJ with representatives of organisations with an interest in housing and homelessness. This provided a valuable opportunity to test ideas and learn about relevant initiatives being taken by other bodies.

CONTEXT

Although the nine projects visited are all in a sense unique, there are many similar projects up and down the country seeking to tackle similar needs. It might therefore be helpful to provide a little context on current levels of homelessness and housing-related need.

Homelessness and housing related need between them cover a broad spectrum from those who are literally without any kind of roof over their heads to those who have a home but not one that adequately meets their needs, perhaps because it is too small.

The most visible form of homelessness is rough sleeping. The Government's autumn 2010 street count estimated there were 1,768 rough sleepers in England. However, the CHAIN database¹ count of individuals sleeping rough in London at least once in 2010/11 was 3,975. Causes can range from relationship or family breakdown to drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness and the simple inability to afford anywhere to stay. Whilst the biggest concentrations of rough sleepers may be in London and other large cities there are significant problems in many other towns and cities.

Crisis estimate that there are ½ million hidden homeless, including those who 'sofa surf' sleeping on the couches of friends and family. If you add in those who are living in overcrowded accommodation the total exceeds 1.5 million. There are some 2 million on housing waiting lists, although some doubt how reliable a measure of housing need this is as waiting lists are not necessarily updated to remove those no longer in need of accommodation and it is possible for someone to be on more than one list.

There are also others who require some kind of supported accommodation, not just somewhere to live. These include young people who have become homeless as a result of family breakdown and require support before they will be able to maintain a tenancy on their own; those with drug and alcohol abuse problems; and ex-offenders who need support adjusting to independent living and becoming ready for work.

¹ Broadway Street to Home report

2. PROJECTS

The nine projects visited were:

- **Harbour Bideford.** A drop-in centre for homeless and marginalised people in the centre of Bideford, North Devon. It is run in small leased premises one street back from the quayside. The premises were refurbished and opened in March 2010 at a cost of a little over £3000. Sessions are run from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm four mornings a week, offering food and companionship to 30-35 people a day. In the afternoons the premises are used for advice and activity sessions. A 'chandlery' supplies clothes and other necessities to homeless people. There are no paid staff. The centre is run by around 40 volunteers, including eight trustees. The annual budget is £26,000. Although the centre has been open for less than 18 months, demand is such that the trustees are looking for larger premises. Funding comes largely from charitable trusts and foundations.
- **The Centre Project, Leicester** runs drop-in sessions for lonely and vulnerable local residents (three days a week) and for those with learning difficulties (two days a week). The Centre also runs a youth club for young unaccompanied asylum seekers from Afghanistan. The premises are in part of a church hall complex that has been converted for the purpose, including the installation of kitchen facilities. Meals are served for £2 a head at the drop-in sessions for local residents. There is a full time centre manager and three part time staff. However, as a result of cuts in funding, the part-time youth worker is now being funded out of reserves. There are some 30 volunteers. The turnover in 2010 was £167,000. A high proportion of the funding comes from Leicester City Council.
- **Justlife Centre, Openshaw, East Manchester** runs a drop-in centre in a highly deprived area of East Manchester for clients living in poor quality bed and breakfast accommodation nearby, often with drug and alcohol abuse or other problems. It is open five days a week serving hot meals on Mondays and Fridays. It offers nurse-led clinics; self management and recovery training (SMART); workshops on arts, cooking, and money management; IT skills and internet access; uses outdoor space as an allotment; and provides support in accessing settled accommodation. It leases premises (a former doctor's surgery). There are four part-time paid staff and around 120 volunteer hours are worked a week. The annual budget is £125,000.
- **Wycombe Homeless Connection** runs a year round programme of drop-in sessions and activity groups to provide advice, support and long-term mentoring as well as a winter night shelter from January to March using seven different church halls, with 12 bed spaces. 'Guests' are referred by the local authority and allowed a maximum of 28 nights in the shelter. They are supported to find move-on accommodation. The progress of guests is monitored using an 'outcome

spider' which they have developed for themselves. There are three paid staff and 250 volunteers. The annual budget is £92k. The John Lewis branch in High Wycombe is a corporate sponsor.

Mervyn was born in Jamaica. He moved to England with his family when he was 9. Whilst at secondary school he was pleased to be able to join a course at the local technical college on painting and decorating, something he has been passionate about since. As a youngster he also taught himself to play chess.

When he was 21 Mervyn was diagnosed with schizophrenia and he has spent time over the years in hospital. He was given medication but found the side effects difficult to contend with so he started self-medicating with street drugs. This eventually led to heroin addiction and he has had a number of drug-related prison sentences.

While in prison last year Mervyn came off heroin. On release he found himself homeless and was referred to the night shelter run by WHC. He fitted in well and enjoyed the company and the chess games. He says,

"I met lots of new, genuine people which helped to strengthen me to do positive things"

The staff team helped Mervyn to find accommodation in a shared house and he has been there ever since. He has a good relationship with the landlord and the landlord's agent and has done some small decorating jobs to help them out.

- **Nottingham Nightstop.** Provides emergency overnight accommodation for 16-25 year olds in the homes of 37 volunteer hosts. It is a partnership between two large churches in Nottingham and uses the model of DePaul Nightstop UK. Clients are referred by the local authority and other local agencies and are expected to return to the referring agency each day to seek long term accommodation. Nottingham Nightstop normally only offers accommodation for up to 10 nights – although support has been provided for longer in exceptional circumstances. 1 job-share provides a vetting and placement service. Following the loss of a local authority grant, annual costs have been cut back to around £34,000.

The first referral of this year was on behalf of a 20 year old young man following a breakdown in his relationship with his partner. He was hosted for a period of 11 consecutive nights in five homes and transported there by six different drivers. He was struck by the welcome he received and the willingness of so many people to open up their homes and offer him a place to stay as well as transport him across the city. Whilst being hosted through Nottingham Nightstop this young man was able to maintain contact with his two young children and successfully apply for supported accommodation at the Canaan Trust.

- **South Tyneside Churches KEY Project** provides a range of housing related support services to young homeless people including: emergency support packs to enable young people to set themselves up in a new home before the benefit cheque comes through; floating tenancy support; a prevention of homelessness programme which includes two prevention of homelessness workers, 'peer education' and other work in local schools, advice and guidance. They also provide supported accommodation providing training for 4 young people in a redundant vicarage – Flavia House – with domestic and life skills training for up to two years. The project had an income of £324,000, expenditure of £234,000 and a staff of eight in 2009-10, but it has since suffered substantial Supporting People cuts. There are dozens of volunteers from local churches who help out in a variety of roles from running activities at the training house for young people to collecting the contents of the emergency packs in local churches.

KEY first started working with "Jack" when he was 17 years old. Jack was homeless because of issues at home. He was staying at the Emergency Bed Unit.

KEY's prevention of homelessness worker supported Jack, who chose to move to a private tenancy with a friend. This did not work out and Jack found himself homeless again and this time he was placed in Coppergate House.

A high proportion of the residents at Coppergate House have drug and alcohol problems. Jack has never had an issue with either and as such struggled to adapt to life at Coppergate House. Feeling isolated and withdrawn, depression soon became prevalent. This in turn led to the cancellation of benefit payments, as Jack was not attending interviews regularly. Rent arrears began to accumulate and, as his attendance at College had fallen, failing the academic year was a distinct possibility.

A referral for residency at Flavia House was received in February 2010 when Jack was 19. He moved in in March.

As a result of the support he has received at Flavia House all previous rent arrears have now been cleared and Jack is up to date with his rent at Flavia House, not having missed a single payment since he moved in. Both Housing and State Benefits are in payment and there have been no issues with either. Jack has also successfully passed his college course and will be returning for a second year in September 2010.

Jack has also attended regular counselling sessions through Escape Interventions and has become involved in project-based activities. These include art and working in the communal garden.

As to the future, Jack hopes to attend University and start a degree course in ICT once his college course has been completed.

- **Cedar Housing, Nottingham, run** a 10-bed supported accommodation project for 16-25 year old women with low-medium support requirements. There is 24/7 on-site supervision and residents are encouraged to attend courses or continue in education. Each resident receives a tailored package of one-to-one support and contributes to a needs assessment that is regularly reviewed with their key worker. Progress is monitored using the Outcome Star tool. There is a centre manager, 3 support staff and 14-part-time staff (including the night staff). Around 10 volunteers help out in a variety of roles, such as running activity sessions for residents. Annual running costs are around £200,000. Housing benefit payments received by residents and a service charge covers 45% of costs, with the remaining 55% funded by donations and grants from charitable bodies and local authorities.

Sally was 16 when her mother met another man via the internet and decided to move to London to live with him. She had just four weeks to find somewhere to live.

Cedar House were able to offer her a room and help her claim benefit. She was helped to settle in and start an NVQ Level 2 in health and social care. Sally flourished, getting on well with staff and residents, becoming particularly fond of the gardening project. She was often to be found outside watering the vegetables that would soon be used in shared residents' meals.

Eventually, Sally was assessed as being capable of independent living and Cedar House were able to help her find move-on accommodation. She does, however, keep in touch with Cedar House and volunteers in the social care sector. In her own words:

"In the year and a half of living at Cedar I have built up my confidence and I am now comfortable with who I am. For me Cedar has been the experience of a lifetime and I feel the staff have become part of my life and family. They have been in my life when I was most in need and helped me to work to find my full potential. All in all I would love to just give something back."

- St John and St James, Sefton.** A large part of the parish is in a Housing Market Renewal Initiative area. It is also one of the 4% most deprived wards in the country according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Acute deprivation has been exacerbated by the state in which the sudden ending of the Housing Market Renewal Initiative in April 2011 has left the area. There is a block of streets consisting of around 750 houses which have been boarded up apart from 50 that are still occupied, many by elderly and disabled residents. Residents have no clarity about when, if ever, they will be re-housed. Decisions are currently awaited from DCLG about whether, and if so to what extent, the area will benefit from a small transition fund that has been made available. The church building has also been knocked down and the funding to replace it with a church and community centre is no longer available. Nevertheless, the church works with the school, a local children's charity and other organisations to support the community, particularly vulnerable mums and kids to build capacity and raise aspirations. However, the opportunities available in the local area are very limited.
- House of Heroes, near Barnstaple,** offers supported residential accommodation for men and women suffering from homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction and other problems in two separate houses set in rural locations in North Devon. The General Manager, Chris Saunders is himself an ex-resident and ex-heroin addict – see box. The houses run a “therapy to community” programme involving confrontation groups in which residents confront each other about negative behaviours and attitudes. There are rules about how they do this and manage their own feelings. The houses have a turnover of around £370,000 – a figure which has grown from around £60,000 five years ago. There are 5 paid staff and 10-12 volunteers, most of whom are ex-residents.

Heroin led to septicaemia and 17 internal abscesses, but somehow Chris pulled through and was given a final chance. Drugs also led to a life of crime. Before Chris stopped offending he had clocked up 176 previous convictions and was sent to HMP Channing's Wood, where he joined the therapeutic community.

After graduating from the programme Chris was paroled to the House of Heroes, Ovis Farm Project, on a farm in Exmoor. After kicking his habit, he discovered a talent for welding and built a new life as an odd job man. The Prince's Trust gave Chris a grant and loan to buy the tools of his trade and, crucially, the support of a volunteer mentor. Chris became a skilled worker and conscientious bookkeeper, with a good work ethic, so he quickly built up a steady stream of clients - a remarkable achievement for a man with 176 previous convictions.

When the farm advertised for a new programme manager, Chris seized the opportunity. In 2008 he was promoted to Project Manager and in 2010 he was promoted to General Manager in charge of overseeing all House of Heroes projects and houses. He's now supporting up to 16 more men and 4 women through their own recovery programme. And even though he's wound down his business, he's putting his new found confidence and motivation to good use.

In 2008 he received the Prince's Trust Young Achiever of the year award and again in late 2009 Chris received the Pride of Britain award for his work on national television.

3. HOW PROJECTS ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

A number of themes are common – or at least repeated – in the projects.

- **Identifying a local need and responding to it.** Most of the projects visited have been started in the relatively recent past. The ‘stories’ of how the project came about often include some event that brought home the harsh realities of homelessness in the local area – the death of a rough sleeper or someone being found unconscious and suffering from hypothermia. Poverty and Homelessness Action Week awareness events have also played a part. The reaction has been to do something about it, rather than expect the council or someone else to tackle the problem - very much in the spirit of ‘Big Society’.

Gary & Hannah Bishop moved to Manchester in 2000 to set up and lead the Eden project in Openshaw, East Manchester. Living in the heart of the Toxteth Street estate and through their work with the community they encountered many people for whom drug and alcohol addiction were a way of life. They built relationships with a group of such people and helped them to access treatment services by providing support before, during and after treatment, using their home as a place of refuge.

Jason was one of the people they met during this time. After a long, wretched battle with heroin addiction Jason found himself in prison and after a 6 months stretch he landed back on Gary and Hannah’s doorstep looking fit and healthy, declaring himself drug free and in search of a different life. He searched for stability in all the usual ways; searching for accommodation, looking for work and finding appropriate healthcare. However, all Jason’s best efforts left him jobless, desperate and living in Gransmoor Avenue; a notorious street comprising 8 large Victorian terraced houses which are home to around 60 drug and alcohol dependent adults. Just a few weeks later Jason was found dead after taking a heroin overdose.

Following this tragedy Gary started a daily routine of walking the few hundred metres from his house to Gransmoor Avenue at lunchtime everyday to reflect on a life lost, to pray and in the hope of meeting someone who would open a door to this hostile and intimidating community.

A few months later a different kind of opening came along: in a chance conversation over the yard wall with a local councillor about Gransmoor Avenue, Gary and Hannah were invited to submit any suggestions they had regarding the regeneration of the road. Progress is complex and slow on the physical regeneration and in the meantime Gary and Hannah have concentrated on serving the needs of that community through the Justlife Centre.

- **Exploring what others are doing and gathering advice/expertise.** The next step has often been to get a group together to find out what is being done locally, explore options and assess viability. Nearby projects have been visited (and some of the projects in turn have generously shared their expertise with other groups considering what they might do in their area). In some cases this phase took many months, during which time the band of supporters dwindled somewhat. In two cases – Nottingham Nightstop and Cedar Housing – the projects have been set up as ‘franchises’ of other projects, providing a more formal advice/mentoring role. This has enabled local groups to start ambitious projects with confidence. There is no need to make the same mistakes others have made.
- **Committed volunteers, persevering.** A recurrent theme was the struggle involved to get the project off the ground. Considerable commitment and persistence has been required; a lot of organisation and administration has had to be waded through; opposition from neighbours has had to be responded to – in some cases with the result that neighbours are now strong supporters of the project, taking an active interest; and negotiations completed to obtain premises at a cost that was affordable.
- **Rallying resources to get the project open.** There are number of stories of groups making the final push to open the doors of project against the odds. The amounts of goodwill and ingenuity that project have tapped show what can be done where there is a will. Examples include Harbour Bideford which managed to refurbish, re-decorate and equip their premises for a mere £3330.95! Cedar House in Nottingham managed to draw on some 1600 hours of voluntary labour – or the equivalent of 200 8 hour days – to refurbish their property. Here, the charity benefited from a very close ongoing relationship with its founding church, Trent Vineyard, a large city church with a strong ethos of serving the local community through volunteering
- **Tapping the resources within local churches.** As one project leader commented, it is easy to underestimate the resources available within churches.
 - **Church buildings.** Some of the projects are using church halls, with or without adaptation to provide premises. Others started in church halls before moving to their current premises. Some churches have provided office space. Buildings such as redundant vicarages can also be pressed into service. The monetary equivalent value of such contributions can be substantial and can be made by churches that have few financial resources, just a building in the right place.
 - **Volunteers.** Churches and groups of churches (whether through organisations like Churches Together or informal networks) can provide access to large numbers of volunteers with a wide range of skills. Wycombe

Homeless Connection, for example, is able to call on over 250 volunteers to staff its night shelter. Several groups take advantage of the skills of church members to provide leaders for activity groups. Volunteers need not, of course, all be people who feel happy taking a front line role: other roles such as doing the accounts or acting as secretary to the Board of Trustees are equally necessary.

- **Financial contributions.** Some churches have been extraordinarily generous. For example, Trent Vineyard church contributed £150,000 to set up the Cedar House project – possibly because of the size of the church and its young, professional membership, but a tradition of stewardship within the church will also be a factor.
- **Contributions in kind.** Whilst many churches will not be able to raise the financial resources contributed by large congregations, smaller churches are making significant contributions in kind, including, for example South Tyneside Churches contributing tinned food and toiletries to make up emergency support packs for young people starting out on a tenancy not yet having received their first benefit cheque. This may not be glamorous, but it helps provide a valuable service.
- **Churches small as well as large.** A further example of the way smaller churches can make a contribution out of proportion to their size is provided by the Wycombe Homeless Connection. Their winter night shelter rotates around seven church halls in the centre of the town, with each of the churches running the hostel to a common formula on its allocated night. Some of the churches are relatively small, but, by being paired with larger suburban congregations, are able to run the shelter.

One of Nottingham Nightstop's volunteers, Kevin, a pharmacist in his late 20's, hosted for the first time over the May bank holiday weekend. We arranged for a 20 year man to stay with him on Saturday night, then he offered to continue hosting on Sunday and Monday nights as well because the placement went so well and no other hosts were available. Kevin said,

"...offering a shelter, a roof over a head and a bed for a night is priceless. After the first night, I wanted to offer him more nights as needed... To share a 'home' for a brief period of time is a joy".

Being hosted through Nottingham Nightstop gave the young man some stability and, with the help of Broxtowe Borough Council, time to secure a private tenancy.

- **Personal, non-judgemental approach, with volunteers giving of themselves and having time to spend with clients.** Whilst it might be difficult to demonstrate conclusively, it would appear that a large part of the success of the projects visited comes from the attitude and commitment of the volunteers and paid staff, motivated by their Christian faith. On more than one occasion comments were made such as, “We don’t take the attitude that “it’s good enough for the homeless”: we won’t serve food that we wouldn’t eat ourselves or hand out clothes we wouldn’t wear ourselves”. Wycombe Homeless Connection refers to its clients as “guests” showing they are valued as human beings. Having time to spend with clients or guests, talking to them, hearing their stories is also important.

“When I was homeless last winter the shelter was a lifeline.... such nice people who made you feel welcome and human again. I think it made a massive difference in my life and all those who were homeless at the time. Brilliant!”

- **A recognition of the importance of helping people out of homelessness, rather than making it more bearable – and a belief that this is possible.** All of the groups were clear that their objective was to help people move on in their lives. They expressed this in a variety of ways. Harbour Bideford spoke of their objective being to help people turn their lives around, not be a crutch for life. WHC’s strap-line is ‘Rebuilding Lives’ and their explicit aim is to enable people to move on in their lives. Residents at Cedar House are required to engage with support sessions and to seek and attend appropriate education, training or employment as a condition of their residency. The experience of their franchise partner, Aquila Way, is that two years would be a maximum period of engagement with the project; otherwise support can become a barrier to personal development rather than an enabler.
- **Employment of ex-clients as volunteers and members of staff.** In many of the projects clients have become volunteers and even members of staff. The most striking example is Chris Saunders, the General Manager of House of Heroes, who was a heroin addict and resident (and at the time critical of a number of aspects of the way in which the house was run). There are other examples in other projects including volunteers at the Justlife Centre and the Wycombe Homeless Connection. Some of the helpers at the Centre Project in Leicester were described as “both giving and receiving” as they were benefitting from a sense of being part of something and the supervision provided as well as genuinely helping to deliver the service. The KEY Project uses ex-clients who have been through youth homelessness as “peer educators” who go into schools to explain to teenagers the realities of leaving home and attempting to set up house on their own, helping to dispel the view that if relationships with parents reach breaking point there is an easy alternative of getting a council flat and living on benefits free from parental constraints.

4. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section discusses the challenges that were evident from the visits to the projects and offers a range of ideas for how the projects and others might respond to enable the work that is being done to be continued or even expanded to meet unmet needs. Many of the ideas arose in discussion with the project teams – and there is plenty of good practice that could usefully be shared.

FINANCIAL PRESSURES

The most obvious challenges are financial, with some projects already suffering as a result of central and local government cuts. Examples include the KEY Project which lost £47,000 from the Supporting People budget and a further £30,000 for night support staff at their training house – a total of £77,000. Nottingham Nightstop had been promised a grant from Nottingham City Council to meet nearly two thirds of their costs only to be told that the money was no longer available when they went to collect the cheque.

Many projects have benefitted greatly from funding from charitable trusts. These are facing increasing calls on their funds in the current financial climate and continued funding on the same scale cannot be guaranteed. Additionally, some trusts may have been happy to support the start-up phase of a new venture and may not be prepared to, in effect, provide continuing revenue subsidies.

Potential strategies include:

- Looking for ways to reduce costs and improve efficiency: getting more out of the money that is available.
- Making the case for funding more effectively to local authorities and other funders
- Looking for new sources of funding or other income.

LOOKING FOR WAYS TO REDUCE COSTS AND IMPROVE EFFICIENCY

Some may feel that being business-like sits oddly with organisations that are motivated by Christian compassion, but, if an organisation wants to help as many people as possible, understanding your costs and controlling them tightly can be as effective in doing this as raising more money. Those running projects have a clear responsibility to use the resources entrusted to them wisely. They are also much more likely to secure funding if they can demonstrate that money given will be used well.

Spreadsheets were in evidence at a number of projects – and not just at the larger projects. Harbour Bideford is perhaps the smallest project visited, but Sue Beer, the Treasurer and a Trustee was bringing her business experience to bear. She could, for example, immediately identify how much it had cost to set up their drop-in centre. She also places a monetary value on the food that is donated. That might seem excessive but having a clear sense of the resources you are using is a key step to using them wisely. Visiting their 'chandlery' confirmed that same approach. The food that is donated is neatly stacked on shelves by sell-by date and the clothes and other essentials that they supply to their clients are washed, repaired and stacked according to size and type. Many much larger commercial organisations could learn a great deal from visiting Harbour Bideford!

Nottingham Nightstop were wrestling with their cost structure following the non-appearance of the promised cheque from Nottingham City Council. At the risk of oversimplifying, the issue is one of economies of scale. Whilst the volunteer hosts provide overnight accommodation without charge, two members of staff are employed in a job-share to receive, vet and allocate referrals, amongst other duties to keep the service running. This is a key role as it is vital that the risks involved in placing a homeless young person in someone's home are properly assessed: there are occasions when the risks are too great that they have to say "no". However, necessary though the function is, in business terms, a full-time equivalent to manage a service provided by 37 volunteer hosts is a large overhead. The net result is that, even though the accommodation itself is 'free', the cost per bed-night taken up is around £150. This might be compared with a cost of bed and breakfast of £35-45, although it has to be doubtful whether for under-18s this would constitute adequate accommodation discharging the local authority's duty in the light of the Southwark Judgement². In discussion, options mentioned included charging referral agencies for what is now a free service; seeking to share a vetting and referral service with similar nightstop services in other areas; and using trained volunteers to vet and allocate clients. The last option might be operated by having a rota of volunteers standing by their phones at home, with calls diverted to them from the published referral number and an expert available 'on call' to consult on difficult borderline cases. (Nottingham Nightstop already operate a 24/7 helpline should volunteer hosts encounter problems.) An argument for this kind of approach is that the Nightstop can go days without getting a referral, and, although there are other roles that the staff perform, there isn't a need to have people in the office everyday to deal with referrals if some other solution could be found. It is not for a study such as this to recommend solutions, but the

² The 'Southwark Judgement' was a House of Lords judgement in 2009 that clarified a local authority's responsibilities to homeless 16 and 17 year olds. In effect it made it clear that, if a 16 or 17 year old presents as homeless, the authority must assess their needs under the Children's Act 1989 and, if they are found to be 'a child in need', accommodate them in accordance with that Act. Only if they are not found to meet the criteria for accommodation under the Children's Act (and that is likely to be rare) can they be dealt with under the less demanding provisions of homeless legislation. In short, children's services departments cannot pass the buck to housing departments. A key point here is that whereas providing Bed and Breakfast accommodation and (otherwise leaving the person to their own devices) might be consistent with an authority's homelessness duties, someone qualifying for accommodation under the Children's Act would need to be accommodated somewhere where their wider support needs could be met.

process Nightstop are going through, analysing their costs and exploring options is one that is widely applicable.

Other examples include the KEY Project exploring the possibility of increasing the bed-spaces in their training house from 4 to 5 – and possibly, but more challenging, to 6 or 7 if attic rooms could be brought into use. As most of the costs are fixed, including the on-site supervision (which isn't 24/7 but is still a major cost), this would substantially reduce the cost per resident. For any future projects of this type there might be a case for looking for properties that could accommodate more, further reducing costs per resident, albeit possibly at the expense of higher start-up costs.

Finally, Homes for Heroes are conducting a fundamental review, having recognised that it cannot be run in the same way as it could five years ago when it turned over around £60,000, given that turnover is likely to exceed £0.5m in a year or two.

Every project is different and hard and fast rules are not appropriate but key points that should be generally applicable are:

- Projects should understand their cost structure in sufficient detail so that they can say how much their service costs per client attending a drop-in session, occupying bed-space or whatever the unit cost appropriate to their service might be.
- It is good to review periodically how services are delivered and to explore whether, once beyond the start-up phase, it is possible to share overheads over more services or reduce unit costs in some other way. What might have been appropriate initially may not be the best approach now or in the future.
- Some but not all projects will have the skills within their teams to analyse their costs and identify options for doing things differently. It is likely, however, that within the churches in the area of each project there are those with business or accountancy skills who might be encouraged volunteer to work with projects on this. Even for projects with in-house expertise there could be value in a fresh pair of eyes. Housing Justice provide support through forums for specific types of projects and more general consultancy support ranging from advice over the phone to full-blown project reviews.

MAKING AN EFFECTIVE CASE FOR FUNDING

Projects that rely heavily on local authority funding, whether from the Supporting People programme or elsewhere are inevitably at risk of having to scale back their activities at a time when budgets are under severe pressure. Unfortunately, this is particularly the case where important and valuable though the services might be, they are not necessary to discharge a local authority's statutory duties. For example, a local authority won't owe the

main homeless duty to a single homeless man over 18 unless there are special circumstances. Inevitably, local authorities will prioritise services that need to be provided to discharge their statutory duties and only when they have done so consider how to allocate their remaining budget.

An important element of making a funding case is to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of the service for which support is sought. This can be done both in terms of the cost of the service provided compared with similar services and in terms of the cost that the council and other public bodies might incur if the service were not provided. An example of the latter approach, albeit on a rather different scale, is research done for DCLG that showed that the Supporting People programme was a 'spend to save' programme i.e. for each pound spent several pounds would be saved in subsequent years in terms of costs in the health service and criminal justice system as well as the cost of providing residential care for older people who without floating sought would not be able to live safely in their existing homes.

It is important that realistic alternatives are costed. For example, it would be wrong to compare the cost of accommodating a 16 or 17 year old through Nottingham Nightstop with putting them up in bed and breakfast when that might not offer adequate support to discharge the local authority's responsibilities under the Southwark judgement. A comparison with the cost of housing young people in supervised hostels would be more realistic – and more favourable to Nottingham Nightstop. Similarly, the relatively low cost rehabilitation service provided by House of Heroes can be compared both with the cost of alternative rehabilitation services and with the likely costs if addicts are left homeless and sink further down a spiral of increased drug dependency; crime to fund their habit; and deteriorating health. The costs in terms of police and court time, the cost of keeping someone in prison, and the health service resources consumed can easily outweigh the cost of supporting House of Heroes – leaving aside the wider social costs and the moral obligation not to ignore the plight of homeless drug addicts.

A key element of any case is to be able to demonstrate that the service provided is effective – not just that it has a low cost per person using the service. A number of projects were able to produce statistics to demonstrate the outcomes they achieved. Some used standard tools such as the 'Outcome Star'. Others had devised their own approach. Whatever the approach such statistics are valuable both to enable a project to see how effective it is (so that it can review and focus its work to deliver the best possible outcomes) and in order to support the case for continued or even additional funding.

The role of advocacy for a project, beyond presenting a written case, should not be overlooked. Local authorities can only go so far in looking at objective evidence to decide how they share out a shrinking pot. Inevitably, political judgements play a part in deciding what gets funded. From that point of view, time spent explaining to elected members what a project offers should be time well spent – as would efforts made to build public support for a project as elected members should ultimately reflect the views and priorities of those who vote for them.

Timing is also crucial. Making a case when the local authority is pulling together its draft budget is much more effective than waiting until a draft budget has been put together and then complaining. At that stage extra money can only be provided by taking it away from some other purpose for which it has been allocated – a far harder thing to do than persuading a council to allocate money in the first place.

LOOKING FOR NEW SOURCES OF INCOME

A few suggestions for new sources of funding or other income inspired by the projects visited:

- Awareness amongst church congregations and more widely on the extent of homelessness is very patchy. Whilst many will be aware of street homelessness in central London, few would think it an issue in places like Bideford and High Wycombe. That Wycombe Homeless Connection can call on 250 volunteers demonstrates that there is a substantial pool of support and suggests that there might be scope for encouraging greater financial giving.
- Wycombe Homeless Connection (WHC), besides enjoying support from churches, charitable trusts and the local authority, are also sponsored by the John Lewis store in the town and a communications company in the healthcare sector. Contributions can be financial, in kind and in helping raise the profile of a project. For example the healthcare communications company have helped create WHC's new logo and laid out their annual report as well as providing financial support. There ought to be scope for more corporate sponsorship in other areas.
- Cedar House have an option to buy the house they lease for their accommodation project and are keen to do so. This would cut down costs by eliminating the rental charge. They may not, however, be able to raise the full cost of the house so another option under consideration is to find a supporter or group of supporters who might buy the house and lease it to them at below the market rent. This idea could have wider application and, indeed, there are a number of organisations facilitating this kind of investment/funding opportunity.

EXPANDING EXISTING PROJECTS

Across the piece the need for the services supplied exceeds what the projects can currently provide. Harbour Bideford, for example, has been opened for less than 18 months and is already looking for larger premises so that it can both accommodate those who squeeze into its premises in less cramped conditions and provide more services such as a washing machine, showers and toilets for clients. (At present clients are directed to public toilets a 100 yards or so away on the quayside.) There is also a need for a night

shelter. The nearest provision is in Barnstaple, 10 miles away. In extreme circumstances, Harbour Bideford has a small fund that it uses to put homeless people up in bed and breakfast accommodation.

Wycombe Homeless Connection regularly has a waiting list for its winter night shelter, suggesting that there is a demand for around twice as many places as it can provide and that, despite the shelter, there may be ten or more people sleeping rough in car parks and doorways in the town in winter months.

When the KEY Project opened their house offering supported accommodation for young people there were 27 applications for 4 places. They are currently exploring the possibility of using other redundant vicarages in a similar way.

The barriers include the availability of suitable premises in a suitable location (as opposition from neighbours is not uncommon); the staff and volunteer resources to plan and implement a new phase of the project; and money. This potentially could be a proving ground for the Government's ambition to establish a Big Society in which local authorities support community groups to tackle problems in their neighbourhoods. Local authorities taking a proactive role in seeking redundant or little used premises in its own estate could enable a needed expansion of services to go ahead at little cost and low risk given that there are groups already established that have proved their ability to run the same or similar services.

REPLICATING SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS

This is a study of nine individual projects – instances in which church-related groups have responded to local needs as they have seen them. There are many other similar projects but doubtless many further areas in which there is a need for the same kind of services. There may be places where church groups have thought about setting up similar services but concluded that the task is too difficult or beyond their resources. In some case, of course, that might have been a realistic assessment but in others, with the right encouragement and guidance equally successful projects might have been created. In cases where one church group felt that it was too small or had insufficient resources, linking up with other, larger congregations or groups of churches through Churches Together or informal networks could bring together the necessary resources. On one visit, it was noted that differences in doctrine and churchmanship were irrelevant when it came to providing a night shelter or some other service for the homeless!

As already noted, all of the projects visited spoke of what they had learnt from other projects and some were involved in helping others get started. The franchising model offers support in greater depth with more formality, potentially reducing the risks further and enabling ambitious projects to get off the ground successfully. Housing Justice offer 'Shelter in a Pack' (<http://bit.ly/lhWU2K>) which provides a comprehensive guide to setting up a winter night shelter. There may be a case for further packs like this on other services.

Some of the projects visited were clearly more easily replicable than others. Those that require substantial capital resources such as setting up a hostel or involve working with clients with acute needs are obviously not good candidates for church groups taking a first step into this area. The starting point must, of course, be the needs that are not being met in the local area combined with a hard-headed assessment of the resources that could be brought to bear in terms of volunteer time, premises and financial support. The best advice perhaps comes from those who have successfully set up projects.

ADVICE ON SETTING UP PROJECTS

The projects visited were asked what advice they would give to other groups thinking of setting up something similar. There were a lot of common themes:

- Perhaps the most frequently made comment was about the need for commitment and passion. Rose-tinted views about doing something worthwhile to help those in need must be tempered by a recognition that there is a lot of hard graft involved:
 - Need to have people with passion – to persevere through difficulties
 - Real commitment is required. You need a minimum number of committed volunteers
 - Volunteer time in large quantities is required, including from trustees
 - There needs to be a willingness to put in a great deal of very hard work!

- Careful research before doing anything was another clear message:
 - Engage the people you are trying to help – and listen to what they are saying
 - Don't be afraid to ask for help
 - Go out and look at what others are doing

- Working with others, including professionals, was a frequently repeated theme
 - Trustees need to have a mix of experience and skills
 - Look to provide professional services with partnerships – and don't be afraid it will water down your faith-based approach, fearing you will be told what to do.
 - Need to work with professionals to enable voluntary workers and charitable contributions to deliver successfully.
 - Need community linkages – joint working is essential
 - Build good relationships with other organisations who can provide support and expertise in different areas. A good partnership with local authorities and others

- Strong ecumenical arrangements and excellent communications are important – enabling the project to tap the resources of as large a group of churches as possible.
- Borrow expert time for free e.g. accounts expertise.
- Speak to neighbours and build relationships with them.
- Comments were also made about getting procedures right:
 - You need good policies and procedures: existing groups are often happy to share their expertise with others groups
 - Good monitoring and evaluation are important.
- Finally two contrasting comments about the scale of ambition
 - Don't be afraid of thinking bigger! There are so many gifted people in the church.
 - Need to be realistic about the commitments you take on. One group was glad they had not tendered for services they might now have difficulty delivering.

STRATEGIC DISCUSSIONS WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND OTHER PARTNERS

Relationships with local authorities varied considerably from project to project. In some cases the local authority clearly had difficulties with the explicitly Christian ethos of the project. In at least one instance there was a reluctance to get too close to local authorities lest that inhibit the ability of the church group to do what it felt called to do in the way it felt it should. Others have worked much more closely with their local authorities. In particular, the Chief Officer of the KEY Project, Jean Burnside, has worked closely with South Tyneside council and sits on strategy groups looking at homelessness issues. She feels that this has given her both a better overview of what is happening in the area and an insight into the council's thinking, with the possibility of influencing its strategic direction. That hasn't, however, prevented the Key Project from despairing of the council's ability to do more than just talk about the need for supported accommodation for homeless young people and to take action itself in setting up its own accommodation project in a redundant vicarage! The relationship that Jean has built up also appears to have helped the Key Project in making the case for funding in some instances – although it certainly hasn't insulated them from cuts in Supporting People funding.

Whilst there may be risks (and no church group will want to be seen to be doing the local authority's bidding) there is much to be said for developing relationships with local authorities. This is particularly the case at a time when funding is tight and the local authority, through no fault of its own, is faced with some invidious choices. Well presented cases for funding, with hard evidence about the cost effectiveness of the services offered, can help the local authority make informed choices, but it would be even better to get into a dialogue with the local authority to discuss their strategy, where the gaps might be and how what a church group do might complement their programme.

LOCAL ADVOCACY

Many of the projects are involved in advocacy in their areas aimed at publicising the work that they do and the plight of their clients. This is important of itself and for the impact it can have indirectly on elected members and other local decision takers who are influenced, at least to an extent, by public opinion. It is certainly the case that many living busy and relatively comfortable middle class lives are unaware of the needs of homeless people in their area – and others who are marginalised and excluded.

Some projects produce leaflets and other publicity materials to a high standard. At least one project is considering producing a DVD. One project has benefitted from professional input given pro bono – and this is perhaps an avenue that others could explore.

There may also be a case for more support from national organisations in enabling this local advocacy work to be more effective. This could include the production of generic leaflets and DVDs, advice on producing local publicity materials and obtaining pro bono professional input; tips on how to approach the media and key local bodies, including schools and churches as well as other service providers. This is an area in which, if it is thought worth pursuing, further scoping work would be needed and funding would need to be found.

5. TACKLING THE UNDERLYING ISSUES

During the visits, discussions often turned to the underlying causes of the problems clients faced. There were a number of recurrent themes and one stark particular issue.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND FAMILY BREAKDOWN

Youth homeless is very different from adult homelessness. The groups focussed on this particular area were clear that family breakdown was the most common cause and that a priority was to intervene to prevent a downward spiral into more entrenched forms of homelessness.

Indeed, part of the motivation behind the Nottingham Nightstop project was to provide a short breathing space in a safe haven, avoiding both rough sleeping and adult hostels in which young people might be exposed to drugs, alcohol and violence. A telling comment was that many of their clients appreciated being accommodated within a stable family environment as they had never experienced this themselves.

Dysfunctional families were a key issue also in St John and St James parish in Sefton, with many young mums never having seen effective parenting or stable family life – one of a number of factors that perpetuate the cycle of exclusion and deprivation from generation to generation.

Similar factors were also in evidence in South Tyneside. A major strand of that project is its prevention of homelessness programme that employs two homelessness prevention workers who offer a mediation service to families at the breaking point and work with young people and their families more generally on the causes of family breakdown. The programme also includes 'peer education' – sending young people who had been through homelessness into schools to tell teenagers about the reality of homelessness and the real costs of setting up home on your own. The intention was to dispel the myth that the easy solution for teenagers experiencing problems at home was to get a flat and set up on their own, doing what they liked when they liked.

Cedar Housing has a good working relationship with another local charity, Broxtowe Youth Homelessness, which successfully runs its own peer education project. Residents from Cedar House have received training from this project as peer educators, and have gone on to receive awards for their school visits, and in one case to volunteer at Broxtowe Youth Homelessness' office.

Of concern was the comment that one project had had difficulty gaining access to schools which were reluctant to make time for topics not covered by the core curriculum. There is

perhaps a case for pressing central and local government to emphasise the importance of making space for life skills issues of this kind - and teaching conflict management and resolution techniques. Ways also need to be found to support parents, and nurseries and primary schools can be good ways to reach hard to reach parents through activities that involve them and their kids.

WORKLESSNESS AND LACK OF PURPOSE

This was a key theme in a number of visits, perhaps brought out most starkly by a client of the KEY Project who, when asked by her floating support worker to explain what her typical day consisted of, said that she did nothing most days. A recurrent picture was of:

- Unstable and dysfunctional families which provided little or no support (and sometimes quite the reverse). On one visit the comment was made that "even the dads are recycled round here". The story was told of one boy who spoke up at a 'tell and share' session in class to say that he had got a new dad only for another boy to shout out, "We've had him and he's crap!"
- Being told by the education system that you are a failure and leaving school with few or no GCSEs.
- A job market that has no need for the skills that many had, with unskilled factory work having been transferred to the Far East.

It was against this background that we were told on the visit to Sefton of the initiatives being taken to provide opportunities for mums and kids to do things together and relate effectively with each other; to celebrate successes; to present positive role models and to encourage young people to lift their sights. For example, Ykids, a children's charity based in Sefton that worked with the parish of St James and St John, had developed 'Hopes and Dreams' workshops which they had taken into every school in the area. They had targeted Year 6s – the top year in primary schools as experience had shown that expectations tended to plummet as children went into secondary school. The message had been that you can achieve great things but you need to work at them and not give up if they don't immediately drop into your lap. To support this they were preparing a 'Dream Book' of interviews with people who had achieved, including a policeman brought up in Bootle who is still policing in Bootle; a hairdresser; and a teacher - as well as more famous people.

However, the backdrop to all of this in Sefton, East Manchester and South Tyneside and to a lesser extent in other areas is of relatively few opportunities for paid work let alone stable long term employment. There was a widely shared sense that helping someone sort out their immediate problems only to establish them in their own flat or bedsit would simply risk re-creating the sense of loneliness and lack of purpose that had underlain the

problems in the first place. A key priority had to be to provide some sense of purpose and self-esteem and a place to belong.

Some projects were tackling this at least in part by offering ex-clients the opportunity to volunteer or even work on a paid basis in the project. Valuable though this is, it cannot be a solution for the majority of clients simply because of the numbers involved. Some projects such as Hope for Heroes are exploring the possibility of setting up a variety of ventures simply to offer work opportunities. There are other examples outside the projects visited where this has been done. However, there is a need for more to be done to identify potential work or work-like opportunities and share good practice in this area. This can include volunteering opportunities, particularly if they involve a commitment to regular attendance and undertaking specific roles and responsibilities.

SHORTAGE OF DECENT LOW COST PRIVATE RENTED HOUSING

Another issue that came up in some of the visits was the shortage of decent low cost private rented accommodation. This came out most strongly at the Justlife project in Openshaw. A substantial proportion of their most needy clients come from a nearby street of shared houses at the very bottom end of the private rented sector – as evidenced by the recent jailing of the manager of one of the houses. Such places can be profitable for their owners simply because there is a shortage of private rented accommodation, which means there are some who have no other option but to accept what they offer no matter how poor a state it might be in. The net result is that landlords can collect housing benefit cheques whilst putting little or no investment into the properties – so producing a high percentage return. The other side of the coin is that such places are only used by those who have no other choice – often people that more respectable private landlords would refuse to house. They therefore become concentrations of deprivation, with the drugs, violence and exploitation that goes with that.

There is a risk that this situation could deteriorate. In a very different and more affluent situation in High Wycombe, it was noted that there were only a handful of landlords prepared to take housing benefit tenants. From the landlords' perspective, why should they take the risks associated with housing benefit tenants when demand for rented property was increasing as more and more who might in more favourable economic circumstances have become owner-occupiers now seek homes in the rented sector? This was likely to be exacerbated by changes to housing benefit with national caps on benefit levels forcing tenants out of higher priced areas, increasing pressure in areas around London. This is particularly the case for shared houses, which are likely to become the only option for 25-35 year old single people who will no longer be provided with housing benefit sufficient to enable them to afford a one bed flat but instead will be limited to the single room rate which has hitherto been provided to those up to 25. A third factor will be the change to the local authority homeless duty which will enable councils to discharge their duty to find accommodation for homeless people in priority need by offering them a

suitable tenancy in the private rented sector. Up to now such households have been able to insist on a secure tenancy in the affordable housing sector.

At bottom this is one consequence of the shortage of house building over the last 20-30 years causing high prices – a situation that has now been exacerbated by the shortage of mortgage funding. The combination of the high cost of property and the high cost of funding means that organisations like housing associations cannot provide rented accommodation at market rates without subsidy despite their evident expertise in housing development. The yield from rents after management and maintenance costs is not sufficient to pay the interest on the capital they would need to borrow.

Responding to this situation, and the particularly dire examples of private rented accommodation in their local area, Justlife have an aspiration to re-develop their site to provide basic but decent short-term accommodation for up to 20 people above the drop-in centre.

LOW DEMAND HOUSING AREAS

Parts of Sefton, including a large part of the parish of St John and St James. are what are known as ‘low demand housing areas’. There are similar areas in other parts of the North and the Midlands. They are areas which have been largely left behind by whilst most of the country has experienced booming house prices and increased prosperity over the last 20-30 years. In these areas there has been little demand for housing; house prices have been low; there have been high numbers of vacant properties; increased population turnover; and, in some places, properties have been abandoned. Problems faced by the areas have also included anti-social behaviour, high levels of worklessness, crime and the fear of crime. The areas affected are often extensive and include substantial numbers of privately owned properties. Unlike higher demand areas, there is no economic mechanism that would lead to the renewal of the housing stock and reinvestment in the area. Without substantial intervention it is likely that the areas would continue to deteriorate, leading to even worse problems.

It was against this background that the Government launched the Housing Market Renewal Programme in 2002. This was intended to be a holistic and sub-regional response to the problem of low demand which encompassed economic, social and environmental issues and did not simply focus on housing. 9 Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder areas were identified, including one on Merseyside that included parts of Sefton. Local partnerships were encouraged to develop and implement solutions tailored to their specific situations, rather than a single approach being handed down from central Government. It was recognised that there needed to be a long term programme backed by substantial resources.

The substantial funding required for housing market renewal inevitably attracted attention in the 2010 Spending Review – in which there was great pressure to cut

spending to reduce the deficit. The current problems faced in Sefton are to a significant extent the result of the decision to cease funding abruptly from April 2011, leaving no time to wind programmes down in an orderly fashion. The Government has, however, made a £30 million transition fund available to the worst affected areas. That money will not go far to alleviate the situations faced by many of households in areas in which renewal has been halted mid-stream. Sefton Council have nevertheless bid for a share of the £30m and a decision is awaited from DCLG.

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the merits of the Housing Market Renewal Initiative and the lack of priority given to it in the 2010 Spending Review when a large number of difficult choices had to be made. However, stopping so quickly a long term programme designed to bring about the renewal of substantial areas through 10 year plus investment programmes was bound to have serious consequences. They may not be as obvious or as newsworthy as a half-finished aircraft carrier, but for those left high and dry in the 50 or so homes still occupied in otherwise abandoned streets, the consequences are no less serious. What is needed in such cases is for spending decisions to be taken on the basis of alternative options that treat those affected decently. The choice should not be between completing a very expensive programme or pulling the plug immediately if that involves leaving people in unacceptable situations. The lowest cost option ought to have been one that provided sufficient funding to put the programme on hold in a manner which left those concerned in a situation that was at very least no worse than they were in when the programme started

UNACCOMPANIED MIGRANT MINORS

A final, specific issue is the plight of young people from Afghanistan who have arrived unaccompanied on or under lorries. They have sought asylum and been placed by a variety of local authorities with foster parents in the Leicester area. Some are accommodated by families who are simply doing it for the foster payments they receive. The young people are not treated as part of the family but expected to stay in their bedroom unless given permission to use other rooms. They are required to leave the house as early as 7am at all times of the year and not to return until the 'man of the house' returns from work in the evening. For such young people, the youth club and other support that the Centre Project in Leicester offers a vital life-line. A study like this can't assess how prevalent such Dickensian treatment might be, but this is an issue that needs exploring further.

6. MAKING A BIGGER IMPACT IN A DIFFICULT CLIMATE

It would be foolish to expect a study like this to present a definitive answer on how faith-based groups can do more in today's difficult financial climate. Each situation is different and the resources that could be brought to bear vary widely. However, there are some approaches and ideas that stand out from the wealth of experience in the nine projects visited and subsequent discussions with national homelessness organisations. This section groups these according to whether they are relevant to existing projects; the wider church community; and local authorities

HOW EXISTING PROJECTS CAN BUILD ON WHAT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED SO FAR

(a) Step back, celebrate and take stock

The acid test of any project is the difference it makes to the lives of those it serves. There is no doubt that all of the projects visited have a good story to tell in this respect. This is something that they, and the local church communities of which they are part, should take time out to celebrate. A common message has been that setting up the projects, negotiating all sorts of hurdles has required tremendous commitment and persistence. Recognising that this has been worthwhile and that lives have been changed is important. It could take a variety of forms including occasions which help clients to recognise what they have achieved and open days to share with the wider community.

Some projects have 'development days' when trustees and project leaders take stock. An annual time of reflection is something all projects might consider.

A key element of this ought to be some reflection on how successes have been achieved – what has worked; what is distinctive about the project, as well as what has gone less well. Understanding your strengths and how as a church-based project you are different from other projects, is fundamental to plotting a way forward as that ought to build on strengths and should be true to the values that have guided the project so far. As part of this, it would be valuable to get feedback from other bodies that have worked with you and, if at all possible, from the clients themselves. The latter would have additional benefits by giving clients a sense of ownership and participation, emphasising that their opinions are valued. It could also contribute to developing clients' skills and confidence.

In all of the projects visited, there were elements of both 'head' and 'heart': there was a sense of conviction and passion that had kept teams pressing on through difficulties and the use of spreadsheets and analysis to understand what could be done and how. Both elements need to be part of taking stock.

There is value in documenting in a simple and straightforward way what has been achieved and how it has been achieved. Drawing on the examples of the projects visited, this should include as far as possible:

- **Data on the numbers of people helped** and the extent to which they have been helped. Many of the projects already have this well documented.
- **Documenting all the resources employed** including money, premises, donated goods and services, and the time of volunteers. Some of the projects visited had a very impressive understanding of this area.
- **Understanding how the resources employed relate to the benefits delivered.** An example here is the Nottingham Nightstop analysis that showed that employing a full-time equivalent to vet and allocate referral (amongst other duties) imposed a cost of around £150 per bed-night taken up. That something is expensive does not, of course, mean that it should be cut out; on the contrary, an effective vetting and allocation service is absolutely essential to a nightstop service. However, a good understanding of your costs can be an essential first step towards getting more out of the resources used – whether it is by finding less expensive ways of delivering a necessary element of the service or by finding ways of sharing overheads with other services so that fixed costs impose less of a financial burden on individual services. In some cases expanding a service can be a good way of cutting unit costs.
- **Understanding how what a project offers compares with alternative ways of meeting needs.** This should include comparing unit costs with similar services or alternatives. Housing Justice may be able to help with cost information if projects have difficulty obtaining details of comparable services. However, care is needed here and a lot more than money should be taken into account. For example comparing what Nottingham Nightstop offer with the cost of putting a young person up in bed and breakfast is a false comparison: not only might bed and breakfast not be a satisfactory solution for 16 and 17 year olds, but the opportunity for a homeless young person to see what a properly functioning home is like and to talk to their host can potentially be of great value. If, however, units cost equal or exceed those of genuinely comparable services that is something that should be understood and addressed. Are there lessons to be learned from how the comparable services are run or are there good reasons why the project costs more – and needs to cost more if it is to be effective and distinctive?

Some projects already have a fairly complete picture in these areas. Others might be able to put this together with their existing paid and voluntary resources. In some cases outside help might be needed and this is an area in which the wider church ought to be able to help. There are likely to be members of churches in the vicinity of all projects that have

the business and financial skills necessary to help projects understand their costs and benefits. These might be people who would not be comfortable or able to volunteer to provide front line services but would be prepared to act as 'volunteer consultant'. Indeed, even where projects are able to carry out the analysis suggested themselves, there could be value in asking a volunteer consultant to look at a project on the basis that fresh eyes can provide new insights.

(b) Understanding the bigger picture and how you fit in

In all of the projects visited there was clear evidence of substantial unmet need both for the services currently being provided by the project and for related services – such as provision of move-on accommodation and more in-depth support. Understanding the extent of that unmet need and what others may or may not be doing to meet it is a key step in a project deciding how it should develop its services.

The role of the local authority is key here. The degree of engagement that projects had with their local authorities varied widely. In one or two cases there was clearly a good relationship that allowed both the project to contribute to the local authority's thinking and the project to benefit from the information available to the local authority about the needs in its area and what was being done about them. In other cases there seemed to be a degree of suspicion, with, on the one hand, projects keen to maintain their independence to respond to needs as they felt called to and, on the other, local authorities nervous of working with religious groups. However, the experience of those projects which do have an effective relationship with their local authorities – relationships that involve mutual respect and a clear recognition of the different viewpoints of the parties – demonstrates that it is possible for church groups to engage without undermining anything that is fundamental to their approach. Moreover, at the current time when local authorities are having to make difficult spending decisions, the benefits of insight into a local authority's thinking could be even greater than in happier times.

A key first step should be to explore what is said in housing and homelessness strategy documents published on local authority websites. However, there is no substitute for entering into a dialogue and developing a relationship with key council officers to develop mutual respect and understanding. Some councils, for example, may have fears that well-intentioned but naive voluntary projects could cut across projects they already commission to help homeless people. A discussion of each others' objectives and what a project actually does could help dispel such concerns.

Liaison with others involved in meeting local needs – both statutory bodies and other charities – is also important. Most local areas will have some form of hostels or homelessness forum or group. This may be a regular get together of organisations working with single homelessness or be more strategic, for example providing oversight of the implementation of the local homelessness strategy. Organisations should try to get involved as regular attendance at such groups is the best way of keeping engaged and

ensuing the organisation remains relevant, is known about and can find out and get involved in emerging initiatives.

(c) **Where next?**

All of the projects visited had aspirations to develop their services to meet needs more fully – and some of these were very ambitious. Indeed, there is something of a pattern here: as a representative of a national homelessness organisation commented, most of the national homelessness organisations can trace their roots back to voluntary work based in church halls.

The idea that there is a progression – from drop-in sessions, to night shelters, to hostels, to residential centres offering support with particular needs – needs treating with caution. It is certainly not appropriate in all cases. There are real step changes as an organisation takes on paid staff, acquires buildings or becomes involved in the delivery of more specialised services to people with more acute needs. Organisations need the capacity to handle these new challenges. However, it also needs to be recognised that in some cases, if voluntary groups don't step into the breach and do something, no one will in the current climate as public funds are simply not available.

Any consideration of developing services ought to include a recognition of the value of what is currently delivered and how it delivers value, perhaps drawing on the 'taking stock' exercise suggested earlier. Drop-in sessions and night shelters in church halls do meet real needs – needs that still need to be met if a project moves on to meet needs 'higher up the chain'. Drop-in sessions and night-shelters in church halls can also offer extremely good value for money as they make good use of volunteer labour and premises that are otherwise under-utilised and made available at little or no cost. Offering equivalent value for money when premises need to be acquired and professional staff employed is a much stiffer challenge and requires different skills.

The experience of the projects visited both in starting up and in developing their service, suggests the following which might be relevant to any project seeking to develop its services:

- **Understanding the need.** This has to be the first step. Is there clear evidence of unmet need that isn't being addressed by statutory bodies or other voluntary agencies? What is the scale of the problem?
- **Options for addressing the problem.** Is the best option to start something new or work to expand what others are doing? Local advocacy work to persuade statutory bodies to respond to a problem might be the best way forward. What scale of project would best meet local needs cost effectively? Research on what others have done in other areas and consultation with bodies such as Housing Justice could pay big dividends.

- **Extent of resources available.** A hard-headed assessment should be made of the resources available. This should not just look at what might be needed to set up the project; it should also consider what will be needed to sustain the project long term. On the other hand, the evidence from some of the projects visited is that, with the right drive, leadership, organisational ability and accountability it is possible to tap large resources and achieve far more than many might have thought possible.
- **Learning from others.** Franchising – as in the case of the Cedar House project – or other less formal support arrangements, can provide practical assistance and reduce the risk. Indeed, there is little value in seeking to reinvent the wheel or in making mistakes others have made!
- **Working with partners.** The KEY Project developed a partnership with a local housing association to refurbish a redundant vicarage to provide accommodation for homeless young people. As KEY had no experience of managing or renovating a property, the Diocese of Durham was more comfortable with leasing their property to an established housing association. The housing association manage the property, carry out all of the refurbishments and repairs, collect the Housing Benefit and set up licence agreements for the tenants. They act as the landlord while the KEY Project, manage the day to day running of the training house, collect the service charge (to cover utility bills) and provide support and training to the young people who live there. In addition, the housing association were able to access HCA (Housing and Communities Agency) funding that KEY would not have been eligible to apply for. Nearly £90,000 grant was obtained to undertake this work. As a landlord they handled the legal side of applying for planning permission and drawing up licence agreements for the tenants. They also provided a lot of support to KEY initially, particularly in relation to dealing with tenants who did not pay their rent, or were breaching their tenancy agreement in other ways. This has been a steep learning curve for KEY, but building on the success of their first accommodation project, they are confident that they can manage a second property themselves.

Developing services need not, of course, necessarily be a question of expanding services or 'moving up the chain'. Doing what you do better by learning from good practice elsewhere can equally help projects achieve more. In some cases, it was clear that project teams were fully (and profitably) stretched delivering their current services so that they had little time to follow what is happening in other places. Easily accessible opportunities to update project leaders and trustees could be very valuable. Housing Justice already run forums for shelters, soup-runs, mentoring and befriending projects as well as more general one for Christians working or volunteering in homelessness. They are open to the possibility of setting up more forums or to develop web-based networks if there is demand (www.housingjustice.org.uk).

HOW THE WIDER CHURCH CAN ENABLE MORE TO BE DONE

(a) Raising awareness

A great deal is already done by Housing Justice, the Church Urban Fund and others to raise the awareness of poverty and homelessness issues within the church community. Examples include Poverty and Homelessness Action week and Poverty Sunday. However, there is still a great deal of ignorance about the needs that exist.

As already suggested, there is a case for individual projects making space to celebrate what they have achieved. The wider church in the locality can play a key role here through special services and events which serve a dual purpose of demonstrating to those working on projects that they are not forgotten and spreading the message about the needs that exist and what is being done to meet them. Celebrating particular projects can help congregations relate more effectively than events dealing in more general terms with an issue.

(b) Using the Church's influence

Churches have more potential to make a difference than is perhaps recognised. This can include both the influence of individuals sitting in the pews and the Church as an organisation.

In any area, church congregations will include both elected members of local authorities and individuals who work in the local council and other statutory service providers. At very least churches should ensure that elected members in their congregation are informed about what church-based groups are doing and how they might do more to meet needs in their area. Both elected members and individuals working in local authorities and other relevant bodies might also help church-based groups to make their case for funding – or for other resources such as under-utilised local authority buildings.

Elected members, whether members of a local church or not, do respond to representations from their constituents. Most do, after all, want to be re-elected at the next election! Encouraging members of church congregations to write to their local councillors supporting church-based projects can have an effect – even if it is only at the level of making the point that a funding cut won't go unnoticed and hence might not be the 'easy saving' they might have thought it to be.

Others in congregations also have a key role to play including landlords of private rented property who might consider, for example, what their faith has to say about accepting tenants on housing benefit.

At a more senior level, representations from the Bishop or other senior figures in a diocese can open doors that letters from project leaders or others in the local church might not. Local authorities are facing difficult financial decisions not of their own making and that will mean that painful cuts have to be made. But it should not be regarded as adequate

for an authority simply to say that it regrets it has to cut funding to a particular project without also addressing how the needs met by the project are to be met in some other way. The ideal ought to be that there is a dialogue with the voluntary sector about how public and third sector resources can between them best meet the needs that exist within the current financial constraints.

(c) Replicating projects

Where there is a need locally – and particularly where a dialogue with the local authority confirms this and indicates that the local authority is not able to respond – direct practical assistance could be given by replicating projects that church groups have run successfully elsewhere. A good number of the projects visited had started relatively recently either spontaneously in response to a recognised need or prompted by some kind of awareness event. Is there, however, a case in the current circumstances for the Church Urban Fund and Housing Justice encouraging churches to consider whether this is something they ought to consider and providing support to put interested groups in touch with sources of expertise? Church Urban Fund might also have a role in putting small churches in areas of greatest need in touch with larger congregations nearby with larger financial resources and more potential volunteers so that they can work in partnership – as is happening with the High Wycombe night shelter.

Church Urban Fund is already seeking to bring together Christian activists together in regional networks – or Joint Ventures - to work together to meet local needs more effectively and efficiently in partnership with individual dioceses (www.cuf.org.uk).

The Cinnamon Network, a group of 100 Chief Executives of Christian denominations and community charities, is also seeking to accelerate the replication of church-led community social action. Their website (<http://bit.ly/nhCm4O>) offers advice on how to go about this, including a useful checklist for churches.

(d) Underlying issues

As already noted, there are number of underlying issues including family relationship breakdown, the lack of parenting skills and a lack of ambition or sense of purpose. Some churches already offer marriage preparation and/or parenting skills courses. There is clearly a need for much more to be done in these areas in certain places. Is this something the church should give more priority to – either on its own or in partnership with others?

The idea that all are valued in the sight of God is a central Christian theme. Demonstrating that this is not just fine-sounding words in a place like Sefton or South Tyneside is a tremendous challenge. But again, is this something that the church should give more priority to?

HOW COUNCILS CAN TAP THE POWER OF CHURCH-BASED GROUPS

(a) Recognising what faith groups are achieving and the resources they have at their disposal

It is clear from the sample of projects visited that church-based groups can bring substantial resources in terms of premises and volunteers to bear at very modest cost and can also raise capital sums to enable much-needed facilities such as the Cedar House project for young women to be established. At a time when local authorities are having to confront the reality that they cannot meet anything like all of the needs in the communities they serve, recognising the added value that such groups can provide ought to be part of their strategic planning. Key questions ought to include, "What is the potential contribution of church and other community based groups in our area?" and "What action could we take at relatively low cost to stimulate that contribution?" Local authorities ought to see themselves as having an enabling or catalytic role. A recent example is Milton Keynes. The council called a meeting which included local churches to discuss solutions to homelessness and invited Housing Justice to speak about shelters. A shelter is now being planned and Housing Justice are to help in training volunteers.

(b) Making resources available

The Coalition Government has been very clear about the important role which the voluntary and community sector can and should play. Recently (2 September 2011) Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles used the occasion of the publication of revised Best Value guidance to local authorities to urge local authorities again to protect voluntary and community groups from disproportionate cuts to their funding. Councils were told that they should not "pull up the drawbridge" in this tough economic climate but look to give greater support to local groups. They ought not to pass on larger reductions to the voluntary and community sectors than they take on themselves and consult those concerned as early as possible before making any final decisions on the future of services. Where they are looking to reduce or end funding, they should give at least three months notice of the actual reduction.

This is a welcome affirmation of the importance of groups like those supported by Church Urban Fund. What matters, of course, is that it is reflected in local decisions. Indeed, it is worth noting that Eric Pickles has suggested that local authorities should look to give *greater* support to local groups. This may sound perverse at a time when authorities are faced with large cuts and difficult choices, but supporting voluntary groups to provide straightforward and much needed frontline services can be a cost effective approach when lack of funding restricts other options. Similarly, very small amounts of investment in supporting local groups to establish themselves could pay large dividends in a year or two.

Support need not just be financial. Under- or un-used buildings could provide premises to enable projects to get underway or expand at little cost to an authority, particularly at a

time when disposal of a surplus property at a good price may not be feasible. Local authority officers also have substantial professional expertise which might be used to help church-based groups become more effective and surmount start-up obstacles more quickly.

(c) Broader support

There are other ways in which local authorities might help local groups make a difference at little or no resource cost. For example, it was of concern to hear how South Tyneside Churches did not always find a ready welcome for their efforts to run peer education events in schools - events in which young people who have been through youth homelessness talk about their experiences. Local authorities ought to be positively encouraging this kind of preventative work.

AVAILABILITY OF LOWER COST PRIVATE RENTED HOUSING

There is one area that demands action from central government: the availability of lower priced private rented accommodation. There are three reasons why this should be a priority:

- The introduction of caps on the amount of benefit payable and the extension of the single room rate from under-25s to under-35s will mean that many will be looking for cheaper accommodation and moving to areas in which it is available. In particular, there will be a significant number of 25-35 year olds who currently have sufficient housing benefit to afford a single bedroom flat or bedsit who will need to find something cheaper, probably a room in a shared house. Already many of the guests at Wycombe Homeless Connection are people who have moved out of London in the hope of finding somewhere more affordable. The housing benefit changes are likely to exacerbate that trend.
- There is a growing number of people who in happier times would have been able to start on the home ownership ladder but are now forced to look for homes in the private rented sector. The net result is likely to be increased pressure on the private rented sector, with rents rising and those on housing benefit being squeezed out as landlords prefer tenants who can pay the rent themselves and do not have a history of homelessness.
- Extremely poor conditions at the bottom end of the private housing market are a key factor in the problems faced by many of the clients of Justlife in East Manchester. The only reason such landlords exist and continue to attract residents is the lack of any other affordable alternative – another manifestation of under supply in the private rented sector. As long as that continues, there will continue

to be landlords who buy property in poor condition cheaply, do little or nothing to it and let it out in exchange for housing benefit cheques.

It can be argued that the shortage of supply in the private rented sector is just part of the general shortage of supply in the housing market – something that the government is seeking to correct through measures such as the New Homes Bonus and reforms to the planning system. Up to a point this is true but there are significant differences between the owner-occupied sector and private renting, not least the availability of funding. A key factor holding back owner occupation at present is the shortage of mortgage funding and the requirement for large deposits. Investment in private rented housing can be funded from other sources including the resources of private individuals and institutions. What is needed is a strategy to increase investment. One option might be tax concessions to promote investment, possibly tied to accommodation targeted at the lower end of the market and those on housing benefit – a sector of the private rented sector that is unlikely to be first in line for new investment without such incentives.

ⁱ More formally the objectives originally identified for the study were:

1. To highlight in more depth the housing-related issues faced by groups working in the most deprived areas, including but not limited to the impact of the government's spending cuts. This is about raising awareness in the Church and equipping church leaders to speak out on these issues in a more informed and persuasive manner;
2. To demonstrate how churches and other local faith-based community groups are already doing to address these issues in their local community, focusing in particular on innovative (and preferably small-scale) approaches that can be replicated elsewhere;
3. To identify the barriers that make it harder for churches and faith-based groups to respond to the needs in their area and how these might be overcome, especially in the current political and economic climate;
4. To advise community activists on how to present their concerns to local policy makers and work effectively with them in order to maximise their chances of achieving their desired outcomes, recognising that effective lobbying and partnership working is needed alongside local action.