Teenage mothers: 
guidelines for supported accommodation

BACKGROUND

The Social Exclusion Report on Teenage Pregnancy, launched by the Prime Minister in June 1999 set out clear aims of reducing teenage pregnancy and of providing a better framework of support for teenage parents and their children. It sets the objective that by “2003, all under 18 teenage lone parents who cannot live with family or partner should be placed in supervised semi-independent housing with support, not in an independent tenancy”. Local authorities have the key role in assessing current support provision for teenage mothers in their areas and developing strategies to meet future needs in partnership with RSLs and the voluntary sector. Guidance was issued to local authorities with the 2000 Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns. The Corporation is working closely with the DETR and the Department of Health’s Teenage Pregnancy Unit to assist the development of this policy.
HOUSING PILOTS

The following six pilot projects have been selected from the 13 schemes being funded from the 2000/2001 ADP round:

- Metropolitan Housing Trust and Ekaya Housing Association; Lambeth
- Tuntum Housing Association; Nottingham
- Nottingham Community Housing Association; Nottingham
- West Pennine Housing Association and Threshold Housing Project; Oldham
- Bromford Carinthia Housing Association; Sandwell
- Bromford Carinthia Housing Association and Gingerbread Advice Centre; Stoke-on-Trent

These housing pilots offer a range of different models of supported accommodation for pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers and are located in areas with the highest teenage pregnancy rates. The six housing pilots will be formally announced at a ministerial launch in July and will be designated as reference sites. The DETR has been commissioned with researching existing models of support for teenage mothers and is due to publish its findings in summer 2001. It is expected that areas of good practice and information regarding what works will be disseminated to other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs).

128 units of accommodation are being funded through the 2000/2001 ADP round with the pilots accounting for 57 of these units. It is estimated that in order to meet the objective stated above, approximately 1500 units of new support provision will need to be made for lone parents under 18, by 2003. It is anticipated that half of the new provision can be met by floating support and half through purpose built/refurbished schemes.
2001/2002 ADP

These guidance notes have been produced to inform RSLs who may be considering making bids for the provision of supported accommodation for teenage mothers in this year’s ADP round. In line with the government objective above, we would anticipate bids for supported housing provision for teenage mothers from RSLs particularly in areas with high teenage pregnancy rates. Projects which cross local authority boundaries, and which are supported by all the local authorities they are proposed to cover, may provide more effective and economic solutions in some areas. In order to ensure best value, and to take into account good practice already identified by the pilots, we anticipate that RSLs submitting bids in this year’s ADP round will have considered the following areas outlined below.

1. NEEDS ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH

The scheme is aimed at those lone parents under the age of 18 who are not able to live with their family or with their partner. Those in the target age group should not be able to have access to this accommodation merely through preference. We would expect any scheme proposals by RSLs to have the support of local authority housing and social services departments, taking account of the proposals for the ‘Supporting People’ programme expected to operate from 2003. These are set out in a number of recent consultation papers issued by the DETR. Where RSLs are making bids for capital funding, we will require written confirmation from the relevant local housing authority and social services authority that the proposals have been identified as a priority to meet long term support needs within a strategy. Authorities have been asked to provide an audit of local needs and their plans for meeting any shortfall in provision in their 2000 HIP returns.
We would expect that the RSL would plan to consult with teenage mothers to identify their needs and wants. One way that this could be undertaken would be to establish a multi-agency working group, in partnership with the local authority, to carry out consultations via a series of focus groups with potential users and to draw on the expertise of people and organisations in the locality who have an in-depth knowledge of the needs of teenage mothers and their children.

2. LINKS WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

We would expect RSLs to make bids for those projects which fit within a broader local strategy for meeting the needs of teenage mothers. The first step towards ensuring this would be contact with the local Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinator. Contact details are available from the Teenage Pregnancy Unit on 020 7972 4574. By locating projects in Sure Start or Sure Start Plus areas, Health Action Zones, SRB areas, and New Deal for Communities areas, RSLs would be able maximise the overall impact of support available to teenage mothers.

3. PROJECT MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

We would expect that at bid stage, an effective partnership with a provisional steering group would have been identified, and a provisional strategic plan would be in place, led by either the local authority or an RSL. The project may be managed either by the RSL itself, or by a managing agent, however, it is important to demonstrate that the organisation responsible for delivering the support services has experience and expertise in working with this client group. If no organisation within the locality has the relevant expertise we would expect to see partnerships with existing providers elsewhere, and/or complementary experience such as working with young people, or delivering intensive family support.
4. DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Schemes that can accommodate teenage mothers who have different levels of support need would be welcome. One approach that could encompass this would be a ‘core and cluster’ model whereby teenage mothers with high support needs would be accommodated in a ‘core’ unit, whilst those with lower needs, or who have moved on from the core unit, would be housed in cluster accommodation within the community. Schemes should be of an appropriate size so that they are proportionate to locally identified needs and demonstrate good value for money.

4.2 We also expect bids to represent good quality schemes that teenage mothers will want to live in. Given that the SEU report makes clear that independent accommodation for 16 and 17 years old single mothers should not be an option, there is a need to be sensitive in considering the type of accommodation proposed for teenage mothers. Generally speaking, self-contained flats, or small, shared houses are likely to be more appropriate than traditional hostel type accommodation. Although the policy refers specifically to 16 and 17 year old teenage mothers, an age range of 16 to 21, or 16 to 25, would be acceptable but we would expect the majority of the estimated 1500 units of new support provision to be allocated to 16 and 17 year olds.

Given that the target for housing all 16 and 17 year old lone mothers in supported accommodation is 2003, we would welcome bids for refurbishment rather than new build where this is possible and is cost effective.

In addition to the provision of supported housing, we would ask RSLs to consider making bids for floating support schemes. RSLs could incorporate such a scheme as part of a ‘core and cluster’ model whereby the floating support team would work
with parents with lower support needs who have been placed in accommodation in the community. This accommodation could be owned by the RSL or leased from the local authority or private sector. Alternatively, in rural areas or areas of low teenage pregnancy density RSLs may consider floating support schemes the most appropriate way to provide support and ensure the social inclusion of teenage parents. Research has shown that floating support is a popular option with teenage parents, and has the benefit of allowing the household to remain within their home when support is no longer needed.

5. SCHEME FEATURES

5.1 Staffing
We would expect that the staffing structure for the scheme would reflect the support needs of the client group identified by the RSLs. Where the needs of the teenage mothers have been identified as being low to medium, we would anticipate that the scheme would have full-time staff working office hours with perhaps an on-call system for out of office hours. If the scheme is proposing to house teenage mothers with high support needs, e.g. those with behavioural difficulties and/or a history of substance misuse, the RSL may consider it to be more appropriate to provide 24-hour cover and to explore this option with the local authority social services department.

5.2 Service Delivery
In order to prepare the mothers for move-on accommodation, the scheme should offer a range of support services designed to develop the independent living skills of the mother. We would expect to see a programme of service delivery focussing on at least the following areas:

• Parenting skills
• Tenancy sustainment (including budgeting skills, cooking skills etc)
Access to further education or training or assistance in maintaining school attendance, with consideration given to how childcare can be provided in the local community to facilitate this.

We would not expect all of the support services offered to tenants to be delivered by staff on site. Rather, we would encourage a support programme built on a multi-agency framework, which links into local groups in the community providing training and employment opportunities for teenage mothers, and to Government programmes such as Sure Start, Education Maintenance Allowance and the Connexions Service. Where appropriate, mediation and family group meetings should be considered to try to help families stay/get back together.

5.3 Rent

We would expect RSLs to forecast a level of rent that is likely to be acceptable in their local authority areas for Housing Benefit purposes. This means that the amount charged should cover items eligible for Housing Benefit and that the inclusive rent should be reasonable when compared with similar accommodation. However, we would also expect RSLs to take into account the issue of affordability for this client group.

5.4 Move-on

An expected length of stay, turnover and requirement for move-on should have been calculated with the RSL giving a commitment to provide a certain amount of accommodation from its general needs stock, and/or an agreement reached with the local authority. In order to assist the transition from living in supported accommodation to living independently in a flat (whether RSL general needs stock or local authority), the RSL or its managing agent should have in place a resettlement package which would offer the young mother support for a period of time, according to her needs, and this should be tapered off gradually.
6. FINANCE

Housing teenage parents is a national priority plus tackling teenage pregnancy is one of the Secretary of State for Health’s 13 key priorities for health and social care. RSLs considering making bids should refer to the 2001/2002 National Investment Strategy which details the additional requirements for all bids in view of the proposals set out in the Supporting People consultation paper. The relevant Housing Corporation Regional Office will consider bids received alongside other competing schemes and client groups.

Supporting People will change the way supported housing for teenage parents is funded from 2003. DETR guidance is that RSLs should continue to work to meet locally identified needs, and use all existing sources of funding in the period up to 2003, including transitional Housing Benefit as well as SHMG. Schemes coming into development between now and 2003 will be guaranteed continuation of their revenue funding until their first review under the Supporting People Changeover arrangements. Between 2003 and 2006 the local Supporting People partnership will review the provision of supported housing for teenage parents within their area and determine future funding support. It is important to emphasise that Local authorities will have to ensure that by 2003, there is enough housing with support for all under 18 teenage lone parents who cannot live with their family or partner.

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