

### The Key Point of Access

The Key Point of Access (KPA) was established as part of the Strategic Review of Homeless Services. The purpose of the KPA was to:

- Streamline the application process for clients in need of hostel accommodation
- Enable comprehensive client data to be compiled, to inform commissioning decisions in the future
- Refer clients to the most appropriate hostel to meet their needs
- Allow early referrals into specialist services through triage assessments
- Work with the Local Connection policy, to ensure clients are supported in the town which will best enable them to work their way out of homelessness

A steering group was established to co-ordinate the implementation of the service. The group was made up of the current hostel providers, First Stop Darlington, Darlington Borough Council Housing Department, other relevant providers and Connexions. It was determined that due to time scales, costs and capacity the service would be established as a pilot, looking only at allocating clients to hostels (rather than to all of the homeless services contracted for by Supporting People).

Due to the diverse make up of the transient users of hostel accommodation, the steering group determined that the KPA would best meet the needs of this client group if it was based both within the local authority and First Stop Darlington. Work was done within the setting up of the service to ensure that both organisations were able to cope with the demands of the service. Each partner received funding to recruit a member of staff and for IT equipment.

The service went live in August 2009, which was later than initially predicted, and therefore its primary purpose of collating data on needs which would inform the homeless specifications for contracts commencing April 2010 was not possible.

The later than predicted start date was due to an attempt to recruit a Project Manager to oversee the pilot implementation, and the need to adhere to procurement regulations to secure a new IT system. However, once workarounds had been put in place, the steering group agreed that the pilot should still take place.

#### Current position - to update

At the end of January 2010 197 clients had been assessed by the KPA.

The following statistics are the outcomes of those assessments:

### **Interview outcome**

Placed in a hostel	100
Refused hostel place	9
Placed in alternative accommodation	14
On waiting list	19
Went to prison	5
Not suitable for hostel accommodation	3
Closed application	32
Not contactable	15

### Local Connection

Local Connection	133
Out of area	64

### **Evaluation of the KPA**

The Strategic Review of Homeless Services vision is to create a pathway of services to enable clients to be supported out of homelessness. This pathway is only going to be possible if we have a comprehensive allocations system, and a consistent application and needs & risk assessment process, along with the ability to track a client throughout their journey.

It is envisaged that the KPA will be the key to the new services and will embracing the governments agenda on personalisation, as well as assisting with other strategies such as the DAAT's 'Safer Communities – Alcohol Harm Reduction' Strategy', which focuses on agencies being able to carry out initial assessments and refer clients into services for substance misuse. This will enable specialist services to devote more of their time to delivering the service, instead of assessing individuals. The strategies aim to link clients up to specialist services at the earliest opportunity should help to reduce the amount of time and resources it takes to get people to address their issues.

The KPA has undergone a comprehensive review, to ensure that it is delivering the objectives that were set for it to achieve.

Issues reviewed:

- Current set up
- Impact on referrals
- Impact on clients
- Stakeholders experience
- Impact on hostels
- Impact of the Local Connection Policy.

## Methodology:

- Devising a questionnaire for clients to complete during their KPA assessment
- Speaking to clients who have been placed in a hostel by the KPA
- Meeting with managers and staff of the KPA
- Obtaining views of stakeholders through meetings and questionnaires
- Individually meeting with hostel providers
- Looking at future commissioning priorities for Supporting People and the Strategic Reviews for 2010/2011, and the feasibility of expanding the KPA to ensure a streamline application process and to ensure needs are met
- Looking at data collected through KPA assessments.

## Summary of findings

Overwhelmingly all the feedback obtained through this evaluation has been positive. This is particularly reassuring, as there were some real concerns from providers and stakeholders over the feasibility of the pilot, and change in culture that the service would bring.

The homeless sector as a whole in Darlington appears to have embraced the pilot, and have worked hard to ensure its success, despite initial referral issues.

Even over the short term of the pilot the KPA is already achieving outcomes.

These are:

- Reducing the length of time clients are waiting for hostel accommodation
- Reducing the number of people from out of area accessing services inappropriately
- Increasing the level of preventative work carried out
- Working in a positive partnership with the Voluntary Sector.

These are remarkable achievements for a service which was brought on line without the required IT resources.

There are concerns about the staffing levels post April should the KPA continue. These are to be resolved prior to this date if we want the intended pathway of services procured through the strategic review to work. This is also linked to the IT system, as again if there is not a more substantive system in place, the holistic element of the service will not be achievable.

As with all reviews, an action plan has been created, drawing on the feedback received from all partners. The positive comments and outcomes achieved to date show that this is a project which should be invested in, and developed to continue enabling clients to access appropriate services in Darlington.

**The main recommendations from this review are:**

- To continue the KPA
- To develop the service to incorporate the new homeless services coming on line from April 2010
- To continue working out of 2 locations
- To increase staff by at least 1 FTE in each location
- To procure a bespoke IT system
- To promote the KPA, its services, the partnership between Darlington Borough Council and First Stop, and also the partnership between the KPA and providers
- To widen the stakeholders for the KPA
- To create a working group to enable the successful expansion of the service and its procedures to ensure flexibility and co-operation
- Work to ensure that First Stop Darlington feel like a true partner.

An action plan will be created to ensure all the recommendations are implemented.

## Report

The following sections report the information obtained from hostel providers, other stakeholders, KPA staff and managers, and clients. Each sector contains an overview of the information received, and a summary. Where issues are raised, actions for improvement are also included.

### **Stakeholder Experience**

As the KPA currently has a narrow remit, pin pointing active stakeholders, outside of the existing hostel providers, was difficult. In all 24 questionnaires were distributed, with a 50% return rate, with responses coming from some key players including Probation and NECA,

In general, all responses were positive, with no open criticism for the KPA. Those who had had involvement with the service found it to be very effective and efficient, with helpful staff.

A copy of the questionnaire is attached at Appendix 1.

An overview of the responses are as follows:

#### **Are your clients/staff aware of the KPA?**

All respondents were aware of the service, but some felt that the staff had more awareness than the service users. It was identified that staff could do with more clarification over the purpose and objectives of the service.

#### **Is there any way that you feel we could increase awareness of the new service?**

A number of respondents felt that the 'preventative' side of the service should be highlighted and promoted, along with the sourcing of appropriate accommodation. Wider stakeholders needed to be targeted, with awareness raising and briefing sessions being held.

#### **Did you find it easy to contact the KPA?**

All responded 'YES'.

#### **What do you think of the location of the KPA?**

No one who responded to this question thought that the KPA was inappropriately located. In the main the responses focused on the increased choice we were giving service users by having two bases located in the centre of town.

*'The two locations offer customers choice, and prevent the customer from not accessing the service if they have a problem with one of the locations'.*

*'First Stop is well known to homeless service users so is a good base. DBC is an obvious choice for those who are homeless, but unaware of First Stop, so also a good base'.*

One response highlighted that a number of clients may not like either location but the respondent felt that such a problem was not 'insurmountable' and would just require 'continued work by both agencies'.

### **Do you think that having the location of the access points for the KPA over two locations works well?**

All responses were very positive about the split between the statutory and voluntary sector. With statements such as;

*'Two locations is the key to success'.*

*'Element of choice'.*

*'More accessible' and we have 'maximised accessibility' in creating the split between the sectors.*

There was a comment which is linked back to the promotion of the service, in that to ensure maximum accessibility the KPA needs to be better promoted.

### **Do you think that the KPA makes accessing help/advice for your client easier than it has been in the past?**

All respondents who had had direct contact with the KPA felt that the whole process was more streamlined and effective. A comment to highlight is one which reflects what the KPA is trying to achieve:

*'Yes - the more all service providers, stakeholders and clients work together, hopefully a better service and outcomes will be provided, especially with customer feedback and involvement'.*

### **Do you think the risk assessment form completed for clients gives you all the information you need to help?**

All respondents who had a working knowledge of the form felt that it met all the requirements they would look for. As with everything, it needs to have the ability to evolve as the service moves forward.

It is beneficial for the services users as *'it saves them from going to different support workers from different services'.*

**Can you think of any improvements that we could make to the risk assessment form?**

No comments were made, other than it needs to have the ability to evolve as the service moves forward.

**Since the introduction of the KPA have you seen a reduction of the number of clients from outside Darlington accessing services?**

Out of the responses, 7 claimed that they had experienced a reduction in clients from out of area.

*'Priority now goes to people that are from the area which is how it should be'.*

The other respondents, except one, stated that they felt they did not have enough information to comment with the one exception stating that; *'Darlington remains a transient area'.*

**Any other comments that you would like to make on the KPA service?**

*'I have referred a number of people to the KPA, and found it very useful for them. Each client I have referred has been offered accommodation within a couple of days, and this has proven to be very successful'.*

*'Specific times for vulnerable individuals or females may be worth considering'.*

*'Speak to agencies about the services it offers'.*

*'I believe the model has shown that it works in the first 6 months'.*

## **Summary**

Overall we received positive responses from Stakeholders. There were no major criticisms which need immediate responses, and any criticisms which were made were constructive and centred around the promotion of the service and its expansion across the sector.

There are no issues around locating the service in two sectors, in fact this is seen as a real positive.

## **Actions**

- Training with providers over role of the KPA
- Increase awareness of the KPA with promotional events

- Monitor those accessing the service, to ensure we are reaching all groups affected by homelessness. KPA Managers to create an action plan to break down barriers to people accessing the service.

## **Impact on Hostels**

As the pilot was launched purely to allocate referrals into the four hostels in Darlington - Tom Raine Court (Salvation Army), Hope House (700 Club), St George's Hall (700 Club) and Middleton Court (YMCA), these are the agencies who have been the most affected by the introduction of the KPA.

Discussing the impact on their services is of paramount importance, it also important to learn from them how things can be improved, before we consider allocating to a wider range of service through the KPA.

We spoke to the Service Managers at the Salvation Army and 700 Club, and to two support workers from the YMCA. In general they were all positive about the service, and praised the close working with the KPA Officers. It was acknowledged that there had been teething problems in relation to accepting referrals, which was probably exacerbated by the homeless tender exercise which coincided with this pilot. The providers initially felt that they were unable to refuse any referrals which were made, leading to a higher than average unplanned move on rate.

An overview of the points raised are discussed below:

### **Impact of KPA on referrals, voids and mix of clients**

All were initially concerned about the void rate. Two were happy about the referrals they were now receiving, and felt that they were able to have a frank discussion with the KPA Officers. The third provider was still reticent over some of the referrals they were receiving, and felt that they were under pressure to accept every referral, although they did feel that the communication with the KPA was improving.

### **Needs & risk assessment - knowledge of clients prior to arrival - what processes do you undertake once you have received a referral?**

All still carry out their own needs & risk assessment. Generally the thought was that the information coming through on the assessments has improved as the service has progressed. There have been a few incidents where insufficient information has been collected on specific issues, but the providers were all happy to approach the relevant officer and point this out. There was concern that the questions were too complicated for younger clients to understand, but were assured by KPA staff that these were explained to them.

There were concerns from one hostel, who felt that the turn around of void rooms was too fast, and that the interview process was a false exercise, as the service



user is already under the impression that the room is theirs following the KPA assessment. Therefore it makes it harder to refuse a person.

### **How are you finding communication with KPA staff - do they take into account your views?**

One agency dealt with First Stop predominately and the other two had more contact with Darlington Borough Council. This is reflective of the service users who would access their hostels.

There is more contact in general from Darlington Borough Council, as they have taken the lead on contacting the hostels on a daily basis, to ensure everything is in order, and to ascertain whether there are any voids, or if anything can be done to prevent a void.

All hostels felt that their views were being considered more when discussing prospective clients.

### **Opinion on the split between the two agencies**

All three agencies were concerned that due to having more contact with Darlington Borough Council, First Stop were not being treated as a true partner. They thought the two contact points allowed the client to express a choice. Ideally the KPA would be located within one building, with both agencies operating from there.

### **Have you had any clients referred from the KPA who have already been linked into specialist services?**

Generally clients have not been linked or referred into specialist services. Where they have been, there is not enough recording of information, and then duplication of work results, as the provider then contacts the same agency to see what has been set up.

The providers would like to retain this role themselves, as they can then make direct contact with the relevant agencies.

### **How can things improve?**

*'Definitely think the KPA is on the right track'.*

It is really productive when the KPA worker attends warning meetings, as the clients are then aware that everyone is 'singing from the same song sheet', and if they are asked to leave one hostel, there really is no where else for them to go.

*'There needs to be more time for hostels to consider the referrals'.*

Needs assessments should be emailed over.

Facility for KPA worker to carry out KPA assessment within the hostel if the client does not want to attend either contact point.

More communication regarding referrals to specialist agencies.

## **Reconnection Policy - any impact?**

External agencies are still approaching all hostels direct, usually on a weekly basis. However, they all feel that the word is out there now, and there is no back door to be able to get the service users directly in to the services.

### **Summary**

The introduction of the KPA raised concerns amongst providers and stakeholders, as it highlighted a number of issues in relation to getting clients assessed, managing voids and not being able to select, to a certain degree, who providers would let into their hostel.

It has therefore been surprising to talk to the different stakeholders, and see that they do have positive opinions about the KPA, and in fact they see it as the way forward, and that it is already reducing the number of clients stuck in 'the revolving door' of homelessness.

The positive comments in relation to the communication they have with KPA staff are the key element to successful partnership working, and working together to ensure the best outcomes for the clients.

#### **Actions:**

- Devise a rota to alternate between First Stop and Darlington Borough Council as being the agency who enquires about voids and issues
- Establish regular meetings between KPA staff and providers, to discuss standards of information on referrals and referral processes
- Ensure new IT system is capable of emailing referrals
- Ensure the KPA is promoted as a partnership between Darlington Borough Council and First Stop - work with First Stop to create an action plan
- Monitor those accessing the service, to ensure we are reaching all groups affected by homelessness. KPA Managers to create an action plan to break down barriers to people accessing the service.

### **Speaking with the KPA Staff**

Both Darlington Borough Council and First Stop Darlington have allocated one Lead Officer, who primarily works on the KPA. This is more so for Darlington Borough Council. First Stop's KPA have a lead worker but other workers are trained for it therefore allowing the service to continue during absences. Whereas, at Darlington Borough Council, there is currently only one officer carrying out KPA interviews and assessments.

Although this is giving this staff member a tremendous knowledge of the hostels, and the communication she has with the hostel providers has been acknowledged as excellent, there could be issues as and when she is on leave

etc. Therefore, this is something we need to consider when addressing future staffing capacities of the service.

Staff from both organisations were spoken to separately, to ensure a more reflective impression of how the partnership is working was obtained. But, as the following notes will illustrate, all staff are pursuing a true partnership, and are working hard to learn each other's cultures and ways of working.

### **On Working Relationships**

Darlington Borough Council have taken the lead on communicating with the hostels, and initially First Stop felt this was upsetting the partnership balance. However, more time is being made available for the First Stop workers to be able to do pre-eviction meetings within the hostels, and both agencies acknowledge that things will change once more services are allocated to through the KPA. It is acknowledged that both agencies have their specialities, and clients will go to whom they feel more comfortable. This is seen as a huge positive. The two lead workers are comfortable with being able to discuss possible referrals with one another, and neither agency feels under pressure to agree with the other.

### **Staffing**

The time constraints of both officers was acknowledged, and both are concerned at the level of work the KPA will entail post April, when new services come on line. Both underestimated the level of work involved, and the pure extent of involvement in each case to ensure the right decisions are made for each client. One felt that there should be two full time posts designated to the KPA and the other thought that it should be one & a half, with some admin. support. As both estimates are similar, it could be taken as a real consideration. So far it has been viewed as important for one person to hold the majority of the knowledge about the clients and where they were placed, however, the feasibility of this has to be questioned when more services are brought on line, and the volume of clients increases.

### **Processes**

Both feel the assessment process is long but necessary, and through engaging the client in the process you find out other information that you would not necessarily pick up. This has led to a level of unexpected preventative work, rather than simply placing clients in a hostel, which is very positive. Officers have listened to the hostel providers when they have requested amendments to the forms, or for more information to be included on the forms about certain things. There were initial concerns that providers were not saying 'no' to any referrals, but providers have been made aware that they are able to do this, as long as they have a recordable reason.

There have been some issues and contradictions over the Local Connection Policy, but these have been worked on by both agencies.

### **Sharing of Information**

No major issues were highlighted. First Stop believed that the process had cut down on the number of people who fail to attend interviews, and people with no connection to Darlington. They felt that the flow of information between all partners was good, and was improving all the time as the trust builds up.

### **Positive/Negative Feedback**

First Stop have only heard positive comments on the KPA, especially from their clients. These are focused on the shorter waiting times for hostel bed spaces, quicker application process and more options, as they are able to look at preventing people from losing their accommodation, and therefore needing hostel accommodation.

Darlington Borough Council have received a lot of positive comments, especially as a lot of stakeholders were uncertain of how successful the KPA could be. The only negative comments are coming from other local authorities, who now have to abide by the Local Connection Policy.

### **Levels of Appropriate/Inappropriate Referrals**

The majority of referrals are appropriate. There were some concerns that some agencies saw the KPA as a 'dumping ground' for whenever their clients had an accommodation issue. There was no consideration given to whether that client was actually suitable for a hostel via a KPA assessment.

### **Personal Perspective of what Improvements are required**

The over riding theme which came out of this question was centred around the poor IT system. This makes things so much more time consuming for First Stop staff, as they are a remote site and have to contend with not being linked directly into Corporate IT. The system is disabling the service rather than assisting it. It is lengthening the process, and calls for constant communication, rather than being able to do everything integrated on line, as was our intention.

More staff need to be allocated to the service to enable it to fulfil the vision we initially created. Both partners are passionate about creating the right pathways for the clients, and also supporting the accommodation providers. Both felt that there was great strength in KPA staff attending the hostels when placements were threatened, to allow the clients to see that we are all 'singing from the same song sheet', and if they were evicted from that hostel, then there was no where else for them to go.

There are concerns from First Stop that at present their participation in a client's journey ends with the hostel placement. This is mainly due to Darlington Borough Council being involved in move on as they have the housing stock etc. However, First Stop feel that this will probably change again when more services come on line.

There are small concerns over some stakeholders viewing the KPA as a Darlington Borough Council project, and not a partnership.

### **Lessons Learnt**

Both partners felt that initially there were barriers between the two agencies, but both were surprised at how easily these were broken down through honest discussions, and a joint aspiration to achieve the same objectives. There was a feeling that both agencies now understand how the other one works, and therefore they are more co-operative with each other. The gap that was there has been bridged.

### **Summary**

An honest interview from both sides, almost mirrored each other views on various issues, but positively any reservations which may have existed about working in partnership have been put aside, and both partners feel that the project is working all the better for having two agencies coming from different perspectives.

There are a number of issues which can be picked up in the action plan in relation to promoting the partnership and expanding the staffing.

### **Actions:**

- Recruitment of additional staff. This will ensure First Stop are able to fulfil the same roles as Darlington Borough Council staff attending pre eviction meetings etc. This staff role will grow as more services come on line
- Establish regular meetings between KPA staff and providers to discuss standard of information on referrals and referral processes
- Ensure the Reconnection Policy is promoted in a positive way, and regularly monitor how it is being received in neighbouring authorities
- Increase awareness of the KPA with promotional events
- Procure a new IT system
- Ensure the KPA is promoted as a partnership between Darlington Borough Council and First Stop - work with First Stop to create an action plan.

## **Discussions with the KPA Managers**

When we first came up with the concept of the KPA, we were lucky to have two managers from the partner agencies who were fully supportive of our vision and who devoted time and effort into making it work. The project was brought in within a short time frame, and although in some instances a bit more planning would have helped, the manner in which we launched the project meant we 'hit the ground running', helped to cement the partnership.

The managers, Tracy Freeman of First Stop and Chris Burke of Darlington Borough Council were both interviewed separately, and the following highlights their main points.

### **Working Arrangements**

Both were highly supportive of the service being split between the two sites, as this is more beneficial to the clients. They were both surprised at how well the arrangement has worked between the two teams, and praised their staff who have enabled this to happen through good communication.

There have been a few issues which have been resolved through communicating and getting to know each others working practices.

Darlington Borough Council feels that there is still work to do to ensure First Stop feel like a true partner.

### **Staffing Levels**

Both managers voiced concerns over the staffing levels, especially post April, when more services are to be routed through the KPA. Some pressures may be alleviated with a more comprehensive IT system. However, surprisingly both think that another FTE post in each location is the minimum required to ensure the project works, with some consideration given to providing administration support in First Stop. Both acknowledge that they initially underestimated the level of work required by their staff.

Chris Burke felt that, although we failed to recruit a Project Officer to implement the service during the pilot, consideration should be given to this post again to enable the service to develop and embed more widely throughout the council and other strategic stakeholders.

### **Processes - Assessments/Local Connection**

The assessment process is time consuming, but we are giving providers a 'good steer' on the client we are referring. Staff are getting more efficient as they do

more. As different services come on line the assessments may need to be slightly altered.

Both agencies have different ways of implementing the Local Connection Policy, which will need further work and clarification prior to the full implementation of this from April 2010. This is not helped by some out of area agencies trying to get clients in 'via the back door'. This can be picked up in the action plan.

### **Sharing of Information between Key Agencies**

Tracy Freeman felt that communication was working really well, and that the lines of communication were always open.

Chris Burke believes that the sharing of information between all agencies and partners works well. There were initial issues with one provider in particular, feeling that they could not say 'no' to any referrals, which resulted in some inappropriate placements, but he understands that this is now resolved.

They both feel that there are not many refusals by providers, but this is due to the discussions which take place between KPA staff and the provider prior to a referral being made. As an accumulative effect, Chris Burke thinks the number of evictions should be reducing.

### **Negative/Positive Comments**

Both report only positive comments from clients, as they like having only one interview, with shorter waiting times for accommodation and all options being considered before placing them in a hostel. Some clients see it as a 'reality check' when they become aware of all agencies working together.

Negative comments have been received on both sides from some providers, especially in the beginning. There needs to be more work on promoting the partnership between the KPA and providers.

### **IT System**

'Desperately need a more comprehensive system'. The initial decision to go for the bespoke database was an error, and the length of time to get an assessment onto the system cannot be underestimated.

There are greater issues for First Stop, due to the security arrangements.

### **Personal Perspective of Improvement Required**

Both managers came up with the following recommendations:

- IT system was a must for both
- A comprehensive Project Plan, to ensure both KPA staff and new providers coming on line post April are aware of each others services, so to ensure a better referrals procedure and allocation of resources

- More promotion of the KPA and the new services
- Processes governing the KPA also need tightening and improving
- To look to recruit an 'Implementation Manager'.

### **Lessons Learnt**

Chris Burke felt that it was a major error to not recruit a Project Manager, and both focused on the IT decision.

It was also acknowledged that partnership working takes a lot of time and effort, but in creating the partnership, the KPA is working.

### **Outcomes**

Both partners are happy to continue working in partnership and expanding the service. Both have the same vision and want to provide the best services to the most appropriate people.

More work needs to be done with strategic partners and departments to ensure the service is fully embedded.

## **Summary**

For both managers to acknowledge that the partnership has taken time and effort, but has enabled a more comprehensive service to be created is a real step forward for joint working between the Statutory and Voluntary Sector.

There have been issues over differences of opinion, but out of this experience has come some respect to and from each side. Both managers highlight the same problems, of which the majority can be addressed through an action plan.

### **Actions:**

- Ensure KPA is promoted as a partnership between Darlington Borough Council and First Stop - work with First Stop to create an action plan
- Ensure additional staff are recruited
- Create further guidance and clarification for KPA staff on Reconnection Policy prior to April 2010
- Create a formal process for KPA staff to attend meetings with clients when they are at risk of losing their place within an accommodation based service to allow the 'reality checks' to continue
- Procure a new IT system
- Increase awareness of the KPA with promotional events



## **Service User Consultation**

Ascertaining the view of the people who become clients of the KPA is integral to this review. If they are finding the process too onerous, or do not like how the service is configured, then it will not achieve its objective of enabling more people to access preventative services and hostel provision.

To ensure we had sufficient information on which to make an informed judgement we went for quantitative and qualitative methods of collecting data. Questionnaires were given to both KPA contact points, and clients were asked to complete them once they had been through the interview and assessment process. Unfortunately, the number of clients willing to complete a questionnaire was low, and in total we only received 10 responses.

A copy of the questionnaire is attached at Appendix 2.

An overview of the responses are as follows:

All respondents found the KPA easy to contact, and found that the location of the contact points; *'good'*, *'its well located'* and *'the location is very helpful'*.

For three of the respondents it was the first time they had needed accommodation, but the remainder felt that the KPA made finding accommodation easier than the previous process. They all felt that the KPA explained to them all their options, and gave appropriate advice.

All but one were happy with the risk assessment process, and could not suggest any improvements to the form. Six respondents indicated that they had been referred onto specialist services, which is really positive and reflects the direction we want the KPA to take.

In relation to reconnection, three respondents did not have a connection to Darlington, and all confirmed that the KPA was assisting them to move back to their home authority.

When asked for any other comments, there were no negative remarks and those which were made, focused on the *'friendly'* and *'helpful'* staff.

### **Talking to Service Users**

To substantiate the information received through the service user questionnaires, we spoke to service users at each of the four hostels.

In total we spoke to fourteen service users, the majority of whom had been placed by the KPA, and some who had experience of the new KPA process, as well as of the old process of having to apply to each hostel independently.

We ensured that the service users we spoke to were a cross cutting sample of people living in our hostels. The age range was vast, mix of men and women, first time homeless and repeat homeless, and those with high needs and low needs. The conversations were informal and were centred on the questions shown at Appendix 3.

The main points highlighted by the service users are shown below and broken down between hostels:

### **The Salvation Army - Tom Raine Court (Five Service Users)**

- Two had accessed First Stop, two had accessed Darlington Borough Council and one had been living there prior to the introduction of the KPA
- Three had lived at the Salvation Army previously and found the KPA process a lot more efficient and quicker
- They found it a 'positive' experience, as there was less paperwork and less traipsing around from one hostel to another
- Found the staff from both KPA sites to be friendly and helpful
- The split between the sites should remain, as not everyone was comfortable coming to the council.
- They were all happy with their information being shared between agencies, as they were aware that it could only help them access the right support.
- The referring into specialist services based on their individual needs was still carried out by staff at the hostel, and they preferred this.

### **700 Club hostels - Hope House & St George's Hall (Five Service Users)**

- Four had accessed the KPA via Darlington Borough Council. The fifth was a care leaver placed by Hambleton Leaving Care Team prior to the introduction of the KPA, and associated Reconnection Policy
- Two were first time homeless and were impressed by how simple the process was
- One who had previously sought accommodation found that their wait this time was only two weeks when previously it had been over four weeks Both repeat homeless service users found the process a lot easier this time and 'less hassle'
- The assessment process was stated as 'quality' as they only had to go through it once instead of at each hostel
- Found the KPA staff good to deal with and they 'get things sorted quickly'
- Three out of the five had not been into First Stop, the other two service users had used their services before.

## **YMCA - Middleton Court, Young Person's Hostel (Four Service Users)**

- Three service users had accessed the service through the KPA via Darlington Borough Council. The fourth had been resident prior to the introduction of the service
- One was first time homeless, who was happy with the assessment he received, and were not intimidated by approaching the Council, even though he was very young and had previously not had any dealings with the authority. He was offered a place at the YMCA after two days of being on the waiting list
- One had previously lived at the YMCA, and on that occasion he had waited a month for place, this time through the KPA he had only waited three weeks.
- The third had lived at the YMCA before, and at the 700 Club hostels. He found that it was easier going to the Council for an assessment and them advising which hostel would best meet his needs, rather than him having to have different assessments done at different places. He thinks this would have maybe stopped him from being removed from hostels on previous occasions.
- There were comments that the YMCA should be able to have more control over half of the clients, as 'its not nice for staff to have to turn people away when they turn up at the door'. The feeling was that the KPA should only make referrals for half of the thirty one units of accommodation.
- They thought that the service should be based in one location, or that the Council should be open on a weekend, or Council staff should be based within First Stop, as many young people do not like accessing First Stop.

### **Summary**

Although we have to acknowledge that this was not extensive service user consultation the responses were a very positive reflection of the service. The transition of moving to one assessment and being able to discuss the accommodation available has been better received than anticipated. Waiting times for being allocated accommodation is also greatly reduced. The split between the 2 agencies is closer than we estimated with people giving varying reasons why they prefer to access one rather than the other. Having the two locations can therefore be only seen as a positive and enabling the client to choose. Any criticisms were constructive and points which can be addressed in the action plan.

### **Actions:**

- Consider involving service users in the working group
- Put mechanisms in place to enable people to make complaints about the KPA. This is to ensure the good practices continue

- Continue monitoring waiting times for placements and interviews
- Look for streamlining processes where possible.

Case studies detailing clients who have been referred to the KPA are attached at Appendix 3.

## **The Way Forward**

The main recommendations from this review are:

- To continue the KPA
- To develop the service to incorporate the new homeless services coming on line from April 2010
- To continue working out of 2 locations
- To increase staff by at least 1 FTE in each location
- To procure a bespoke IT system
- To promote the KPA, its services, the partnership between Darlington Borough Council and First Stop, and also the partnership between the KPA and providers
- To widen the stakeholders for the KPA
- To create a working group to enable the successful expansion of the service and its procedures to ensure flexibility and co-operation
- Work to ensure that First Stop Darlington feel like a true partner.

An action plan will be created to ensure all the recommendations are implemented, as well as the individual actions précised after each section.

Post April 2010 the service will undergo further changes as more services come on line. From then we will be able to create pathways out of homelessness and be able to trace people's journeys. This data will become invaluable as we continue to evolve our services.

It will be essential to review the service again after a period of approximately twelve months, to ensure it continues to achieve the set aims and objectives.

**Appendix 1 - Stakeholder Questionnaire**

**QUESTIONNAIRE - KEY POINT OF ACCESS (KPA) SERVICE**

The KPA aims to help people in Darlington who are currently homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless due to problems they need support with. This new service works by giving clients:

- a choice over their point of contact
- an immediate assessment of needs and risk
- a common assessment
- referral to appropriate services and accommodation
- prevention of homelessness options
- the availability of all known homeless places and services
- the opportunity to highlight any issues they may have from the outset

We are currently evaluating the impact of this new service, and as a stakeholder, would be very grateful if you could complete this questionnaire, to help us to identify any improvements that can be made.

Thank you.

---

**Are your clients/staff aware of the Key Point of Access service?**

**Is there any way that you feel we could increase awareness of the new service?**

**Did you find it easy to contact the Key Point of Access?**

Yes

No - if not can you tell us why

**What do you think of the location of the Key Point of Access bases?**

Comments:

**Do you think that having the location of the access points for the Key Point of Access over two locations works well?**

Comments:

**Do you think that the Key Point of Access makes accessing help/advice for your clients easier than it has been in the past?**

Yes

No

Comments:

**Do you think the Risk Assessment Form completed for clients gives you all the information you need to help?**

Yes

No

**Can you think of any improvements that we could make to the Risk Assessment Form?**

**Since the introduction of the KPA service in August, have you seen a reduction of the numbers of clients from outside Darlington accessing services?**

Yes

No

Comments

**Any other comments that you would like to make on the KPA service.**

**Thank you for your time**

**Appendix 2 - Service User Questionnaire**

**QUESTIONNAIRE - KEY POINT OF ACCESS SERVICE**

As the Key Point of Access service has now been running since August, we are interested to find out what you think of the service.

We would be very grateful if you could spare a few minutes to answer a few questions. You do not have to give your name, and the information that you give will help us to identify any improvements that can be made to the new service.

Thank you.

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**How did you find out about the Key Point of Access?**

**Did you find it easy to contact the Key Point of Access?**

**What do you think of the location of the Key Point of Access bases?**

**Do you think that the Key Point of Access makes finding accommodation easier than it has been in the past?**



**Do you think the Risk Assessment Form asks for all the information needed to make sure that you get the help that you need?**

 Yes No

**Can you think of any improvements that we could make to the Risk Assessment Form?**

**Did the KPA help you with any referrals to other specialist agencies?**

 Yes No

**Do you think that the KPA helped you with housing advice, and explained all the options available to you?**

 Yes No

Comments

**Is the KPA helping you to find permanent housing?**

 Yes No

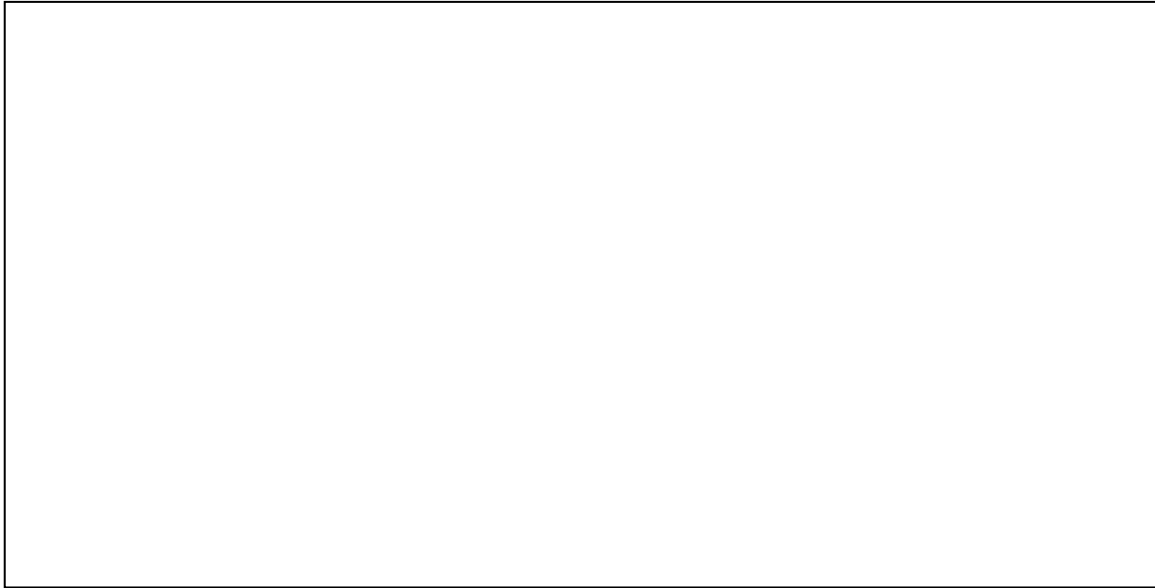
Comments

**If you are not originally from Darlington, is the KPA helping you to get back to the support networks that you have in your local area?**

 Yes No

Comments

**Any other comments that you would like to make on the KPA service.**

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to provide any other comments on the KPA service.

**Thank you for your time.**

### **Appendix 3 - Service User Questions**

- How did you find out about the KPA?
- Did you all use First Stop?
- What did you think of the assessment process, and is it better than the process you had to go through?
- Did you feel you were treated well by the staff?
- Did you want to come to this hostel, or were you advised that this was the best service to meet your needs?
- Are there specific reasons why you did not use the Council?
- Do you think it's a good idea to have the KPA split over 2 locations?
- Has the KPA made finding accommodation easier?
- What did you think of the questions asked on the needs assessment - are there any changes that could be made to make it better?
- Did the assessment identify any needs that need addressing by a specialist service? Did the KPA staff tell you about this and make a referral to the service or did the staff here do it?

## **Appendix 4 - KPA Case Studies**

### **Client A**

Client A had a relationship breakdown with mother. Her mother did not like her new boyfriend, and had asked Client A to leave the house. Mother gave Client A one week to be out. Client A had a KPA interview.

Although Client A lives in Richmond and has grown up in Richmond, she had secured a job in Darlington working 16hrs in a nursery and was hopeful for full-time employment, and wanted to go into the YMCA until she could become more self sufficient and build up her living skills, as she had never lived independently.

Reports from the YMCA on 6th November 2009 stated that Client A had demonstrated her ability to maintain her tenancy, by paying her rent on time, she keeps her flat clean and tidy and engages well in support sessions. They stated that she had the independent skills to budget and manage a tenancy.

Client A was offered a flat at 18 Ramsgill House and her tenancy started on 18th December 2009.

### **Client B**

Client B has continuously been in and out of prison over the last five years, he would never entertain going into a hostel in the past and has always returned to his mother's house. This time, after having a meeting with both Client B and his Probation Officer in prison, Client B decided to try going into a hostel.

Client B was released from Holme House Prison early, due to good behaviour on a HDC, he had to stay at his Mother's house for 14 days. Client B was then moved into Hope House on 20th October 2009. All agencies reported that he was very positive and engaged with all services. His drug use was reducing and Client B had a very positive attitude, he was a very good influence on other residents with the same issues as himself.

Visited Hope House a couple of times, and also spoke to Client B personally, congratulating him on how well he was doing, giving him positive feedback.

Unfortunately Client B was recalled to Holme House Prison, as he committed another crime and Probation had no other options. Speaking to his Probation Officer, everything was positive, unfortunately Client B started using, as it was the anniversary of his father's death.

### **Client C**

Client is 37 year old man, who has been no fixed abode for a long time. He has been staying with different people of their sofas etc. Client never had a place to call his own since he split up with his girlfriend. A lot of offences committed by client are around domestic abuse, and client has been on a course to help him with this.

Client feels that a hostel would be the best place for him to stay in at the moment, as he would get the support and help he needs, as he sometimes has a problem with alcohol.

Completed the risk assessment with client, and discussed option when we did the KPA interview on 10/9/09, and managed to find a hostel place in the Salvation Army Darlington the same day.

Client had support while in the Salvation Army, and then moved into a private rented property of his own 13.11.09.

### **Client D**

Client is a 42 year old man, who came in for a KPA appointment on 11/09/09. He had been staying with friends in Darlington for a few months, but finding it had to stay in one place. He has been in prison a lot in the past 7 years, with only a couple of days or weeks in between sentences. Client is on a drug testing order at the moment, and is a profile of a prolific offender (PPO).

Clients main drug use is class A drugs, which he did not start till about 7 years ago. Up till then client worked full time as a mental health worker.

We offered a place a Hope House hostel to client 14/09/09.

Client moved from Hope House into a rehab programme in South Shields 7/12/09, as this was the best place for him to get off drugs.