



The Elms Continual Improvement Review August 2017

Annual Equality Impact Assessment

DENS are committed to promoting equality and diversity within its services. The Council and DENS continue to work closely together to ensure that the service provided is joined up and clients are provided with appropriate advice and assessment to secure accommodation.

Where DENS is not able to provide a service due to the immigration status of the client or health or safety restrictions, which can relate to previous offending behaviour of the client, DENS works closely with the Council to ensure the client receives appropriate advice and intervention to prevent street homelessness.

DENS will make adjustments to service provision and provide specialist individual to uphold diversity and equality principles. Examples of this include ensuring a halal diet is available, supporting a transgender resident who is in transition to access appropriate support and providing appropriated facilities for residents to meet with support services.

Performance

DENS strive to constantly improve the service we provide for all our service users.

Client Data: We use Inform as our CRM, which ensures all residents information and support plans are updated in real time and kept safe. This system is used across all DENS services, allowing for a quicker and more informed referral process across our services.



All residents complete Outcome Star within 5 days of entering the Elms and this is reviewed in their key worker session four weekly. Outcome Star is an effective and well recognised tool for measuring distance travelled and is also used to encourage and motivate residents.

Move On: To ensure a more effective and informed referral to our DRA (supported tenancy programme) from the Elms, the DRA Manager and Senior Support Worker, now meets weekly to discuss potential referrals. The Elms Key Workers complete referral forms and ensures all appropriate personal documentation is in place to DRA prior to a vacancy becoming available. To support the Elms residents in transition into to DRA, where possible the key worker will visit the tenant in their DRA property post move out. These changes have resulted in an increase in successful moves to DRA.

The ETC Manager holds a housing clinic every Monday, supporting Elms residents to sign onto the housing register and bid for properties.

Development and Training for Residents: The ETC Manager continues to work closely with Elms staff and residents, providing a range of skills-based courses to support residents with employability, as well as skills to maintain a tenancy. These courses are often run in partnership with other third sector organisations and local groups and include cooking courses, money management run in conjunction with CAP, First Aid, Health & Safety training, and Food Hygiene Level 2.

Support for Residents: In the previous year, we have introduced counselling session for residents, up to 6 sessions per resident. Residents can self-refer or be referred by a staff member, attendance is voluntary. The counselling had been very well received and is regularly accessed by residents. Staff have seen a positive change in behaviour and attitude of and number of residents who attend.



Partnership Working: Partnership working is key to the success of DENS, not only at The Elms, but organisationally.

The Elms Manager meets fortnightly with the Operational Manager, (Strategic Housing Team Leader). Quarterly Core Group meetings are held to ensure the contract is appropriately implemented and monitored. These meetings are attended by the Assistant Director of Housing, Group Leader Strategic Housing, DENS CEO and the Elms Manager.

The DENS CEO is now the Chair of the Dacorum Homelessness Forum.

The Elms work closely with a number of third sector and public sector organisations, including HYH and Turning Point, who manage the Mental Health High Support Needs programme, CGL, Open Door and Druglink. Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous all hold weekly meetings at the Elms.

Service Charges: Service Charge collection is the responsibility of DENS. Residents are informed on a weekly basis what they owe and issued with warning letters if they fail to pay. After 4 weeks of non-payment, residents are evicted if they cannot provide evidence to support their case of non-payment. All debts are kept on file and if a former residents re approaches for accommodation, they will be expected to pay outstanding debts.

Residents or former residents with outstanding debts will not be accepted by DRA.

A hand held card machine will be in place eminently, meaning payments for personal contributions can be taken from residents any time of the day by any member of staff. We expect this to result in small increase service charge payments.

The table below shows personal contributions collected, with total to date listed below.

| Month | Collected | Total |
|----------------|-----------|------------|
| September 2016 | £3908.60 | £3908.60 |
| October 2016 | £4272.00 | £8180.60 |
| November 2016 | £4390.00 | £12,570.60 |
| December 2016 | £2576.00 | £15,146.60 |
| January 2017 | £5447.00 | £20,593.60 |
| February 2017 | £4174.00 | £24,767.60 |
| March 2017 | £5046.00 | £29,813.60 |
| April 2017 | £3176.00 | £32,989.60 |
| May 2017 | £4422.00 | £37,411.60 |
| June 2017 | £4079.00 | £41,490.60 |
| July 2017 | £5450.00 | £46,940.60 |

The Elms yearly targets and Key Performance Indicators are listed below:

| | |
|---|----------|
| Occupation Rate | 97% |
| Percentage Of Rooms available within 24 hours | 100% |
| Personal contribution arrears | 11% |
| Housing Benefit arrears | 18% |
| Positive Move on rate | 56% |
| Percentage of support plans up to date | 100% |
| Average Stay | 117 Days |

Our positive move on rate has been affected by residents that have been evicted, recalled to prison or abandoned their accommodation at The Elms. Anti-social behaviour has been the major factor for eviction; we are currently offered counselling to the residents in an attempt to reduce evictions. Our in house counsellor is supporting residents with anger management and also helping residents to identify triggers in behaviour, and address methods of dealing with stress & anxiety.

Challenges

A significant number of residents have low to medium mental health needs and substance abuse issues. A difficulty faced by the Elms is identifying appropriate and timely support to refer the residents too; both out-reach support and on occasion an appropriate residential service to refer to. Good links have been built with other third sector providers. However the lack of appropriate of mental health support services in the area, impact on The Elms in terms of being able to support residents and being able to successfully move on.

Managing expectations and ensuring appropriated referrals has continued to be an issue, particularly in terms of above. This is improving, due to the relationship built between DBC staff and the Elms. Identifying appropriate move on accommodation continues to be an on-going issue. By the nature of the residents at the Elms, there will always be an issue with residents not paying their personal contribution charges and inappropriate and unacceptable behaviour, resulting in evictions. This tends to be more likely with the younger client group (under 35 years).

For a period of time, the Elms struggle to find a decent, reasonably priced caterer, resulting in a number of changes in caterers. This has now been resolved, with The Elms directly employing a chef. There were on-going issue with the phone provider, leading to significant outage of service. This had now been resolved, with a new provider commencing in September. In the summer months, there has been an increase in residents returning to the Elms intoxicated and displaying unacceptable behaviour. This has been dealt with by increasing the number of hours the security guard works during these periods.



A challenge has been identifying and implementing a plan for income generation from commercial ventures. This has not been possible in year 2. DENS have offered office and meeting space to another national charity, at a discount rate however they did not follow this up. Some of the Elms residents have volunteered in the Furniture Warehouse and coppicing, which are DENS wide enterprise ventures. The DENS Board are aware of this and it will be considered at their September Board meeting.

Planned Improvements For The Third Year:

DENS will be opening an extension of its current Day Centre in October 2017. The 'Open Space' centre will be located at the Hub, along with DENS Central Services, Foodbank and Furniture Warehouse. The space will provide a greater range of personal development courses for service users, including Elms residents, along with a peer listening scheme. There will also be a number of 'drop in' surgeries led by other third and statutory sector organisations, increasing the range of support on offer to our residents.

- Greater volunteering opportunities within DENS, particularly at the Warehouse and improving properties through DRA, will be made available for Elms residents. This will be supported by the ETC Manager.
- The Elms and DRA will jointly run Tenancy Support Training for Elms residents. Completion will be a pre-requisite for referral to DRA.
- Working with Experian to explore programmes available to support Elms residents to open banks/credit union accounts, as well as how to improve their credit rating.
- Increase income from Service Charges, through use of card machine.
- Identify any income generation ventures.
- Continue to work with partners, with a focus on possible development of greater support for residents with mental issues.
- All interview panels for operational staff within DENS will now include someone with direct experience of homelessness.



DENS is aware that introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act in April 2018, will lead to an increase in demand for services within Dacorum. DENS are committed to working with DBC and the Homeless Forum to meet the increase in demand. DENS is currently scoping out how to increase its DRA portfolio, as part of this work.

Customer Feedback

Residents meetings are held monthly and the times of these are advertised widely within the Elms. There is also a suggestion box at the Elms. Residents will complete an improvement questionnaire at the next meeting. Service users will also complete an exit questionnaire when departing The Elms to evaluate their time at The Elms.

Wendy Lewington

Sean Fitzgerald

22nd August 2017