

Brent Irish advisory service

Housing Advisory Committee

HOUSING WORKER'S REPORT 29th OCTOBER 1984 (FOR MEETING OF 5th NOVEMBER)

Since my last report (14th August) the main developments have been:-

- (1) Our Short-Life house in Kensal Rise
- (2) Meetings with representatives of West Hampstead Housing Association
- (3) Steps towards setting up our own Housing Association

The time involved in casework with new and old clients has meant that I have been unable to pursue further research. Since 15th August, a total of 59 "households" have come to me for assistance. This figure rises to 71 if each of the single people in housing need is counted separately, rather than as part of a flat-share household. This seems necessary on the basis of the latest information I have had from Brent Council Officers, viz, that the flat-share scheme is already over-subscribed and that no new applicants have any chance, so it is better for each to apply separately.

The new referrals break down into the following categories:-

Badly housed, who would be in "priority need" under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 if they were homeless, requiring accommodation - 11
altogether, including 2 households with children.

Homeless/Badly housed, NOT in priority need - 34 referrals, of individuals or groups of adults: 46 individuals altogether.

Homeless and in priority need - 9, of which 7 are households with children or with a member who is pregnant.

Transfer Applicants (in the public sector) - 4.

"Other" - 3 - 1 Improvement Grant problem, 1 public sector tenant with a repair problem but not requiring rehousing, 1 Housing Benefit problem.

Following the request made at the last meeting, I have compiled the following analysis of enquiries in the "other" category since April 2nd:-

Total - 11. Private Landlord harassment (but not requiring rehousing) - 2; Temporary accommodation - 1; Improvement Grant - 2; Public Sector repair problem (but not requiring rehousing) - 2; Housing Benefit - 2; Private Landlord harassment (but not requiring rehousing) - 2; Compulsory Purchase Order - 2.

None of the above figures include people seeking to return to Ireland permanently, of which there have been about 10 since April 2nd.

Referrals

3 more clients have been referred to Brent Council under the Quota scheme:-

Mr A and Ms B (a couple), both of Irish parents, brought up in Cricklewood. Mr A a roofer, Ms B unemployed. 10 months with BIAS. With Ms B's family in council flat in St Raphael's estate. Aged 22 and 19 respectively.

Ms C. Aged 27. Display assistant in a store in Kilburn High Road. Has lived in an insanitary room sharing a toilet with 10 people in a multi-occupied house in Kilburn since arriving from Co Cavan in October 1981.

Mr D: Kilburn-born, of Irish parents. Aged 26. Currently unemployed, and living in B&B following ejection by mother, who has a history of mental instability. Was himself suffering mental strain, and benefited from the quality B&B we found for him. Refused short-life house, as likes the B&B and wants any move to be permanent.

Housing Associations - No direct referrals have been housed by housing associations since August. However, I am pleased to report that Mr E, aged/

aged/

40, with severe health problems, has been given a flat by Brent People's Housing Association. Mr E, originally from Co Clare, was sleeping rough until brought by BIAS to the Housing Provisions Unit, where he was accepted as homeless and in priority need through vulnerability because of his medical condition. We have also helped Mr E, who is in receipt of Invalidity Benefit, to obtain a Travel Permit and a furniture grant. Mr E and others like him will need continuing support, and this seems an area where our voluntary workers may be useful.

BPHA have complained that we have referred too many cases to them, and have asked us to concentrate on a few for whom particular consideration is justified. Those whom we refer must be Brent residents, and should be in housing need and vulnerable, although not sufficiently so to be considered in "priority need". There should also be a reason why they would not be suitable for a council estate, and have no other method of obtaining accommodation. I have therefore resolved to "push" the following three (2 have been accepted to the BPHA "pool", 1 by the Satellite Office):-

(1) Mrs F. Aged 47. In London since 1953, from Co Tipperary. Worked as domestic until married in 1973. Separated 1981. Shares bed-sit with 21-year-old niece, who replaced her sister, with whom she had shared since 1981. Present situation causing great strain. About to be made redundant from post as a domestic.

(2) Mr G. Originally from Co Carlow. Aged 46. Self-employed building worker. Lived for 18 years in private sub-tenancy in NW2. Resident landlady had stroke: nephew wants to sell the house, has started eviction proceedings.

(3) Mr H: From Co Galway. Aged 27. In London from 1981. Suffered prolonged concussion as a result of a motor-cycle accident in 1978 and had to stop working. On coming to London, was able to recommence work, first as a caretaker and then as a trainee paver on a TOPS course, necessitating a move to a small (12' x 4') room with resident landlord. (Actually, statutorily overcrowded.) In Feb 1984 a barman in Cricklewood broke a billiards cue over his head and the concussion reappeared. Legal proceedings (civil) are being taken against the attacker, as the police said they would not prosecute. Despite a letter from the Senior Registrar in Psychiatry at the Royal Free Hospital, Brent Council have awarded him only 15 medical points, which is insufficient for council housing.

PCHA's pledges to Brent Council now mean that empty properties will be given as temporary accommodation to homeless families in B&B, while their nomination debt makes them unable to provide us with referral rights for secure tenancies at present. I think further discussion with PCHA is called for, to point out that it would be unfortunate if this admirable concern to help the homeless led to the neglect of the section of the population suffering most from homelessness - the Irish community.

Metropolitan Housing Trust have not produced any accommodation, although I have written asking if they could give consideration to Mrs F, whose social connections are in Wembley and Harrow, where MHT have properties.

SHORT-LIFE house in Kensal Rise - This is owned by BPHA. Thanks to the hard work of the first 3 residents and our supporters, and the kind donation of a kitchen sink by West Hampstead Housing Association, there are now 6 viable bedrooms. Selecting the licensees, especially at the start, meant the careful balancing of a number of factors: Housing need; lack of alternatives; vulnerability...but also compatibility, sociability and, initially, practical building skills. Where facilities are shared, a desirable mix of persons is also needed. The situation was complicated by the unexpectedly high refusal rate (14 refusals so far: 5 rooms let), partly because several, especially

especially young, clients had since coming to us found their own temporary solutions.

The 5 current residents are:-

Mr I. Aged 59, Irish-born self-employed building worker. Was living in a damp room that used to be a kitchen, with no heating or cooking facilities, sharing a bathroom with 7 others.

Mr J, aged 44. Born in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne of Irish parents. Came to London in 1958. 10 months with BIAS. Building worker. Was homeless, drifting between squats since his divorce. Children and grandchildren in Cricklewood.

Mr K. Aged 43. Unemployed. Was in B&B following marital breakup. From Co Waterford.

Mr L. Irish-born. Aged 30. Has worked in Central Middlesex Hospital for last 7 years. Lost accom when owner of house where he was living returned and needed it for his own use, so moved in May of this year to an insanitary room in Willesden.

Ms M. Aged 30. In London since 1970, from Co Donegal. Lost accom in late 1970's through marital separation and (July 1984) through landlord harassment. Was homeless, drifting between friends' flats. Circumstances exacerbated by her job as a waitress requiring her to make her own way home at up to 4 am.

It is recommended that the residents be asked to appoint a representative to the Advisory Committee.

WEST HAMPSTEAD HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Linda Saunders arranged a meeting between us and Bob Keats of WHHA, where he said he would propose to the WHHA Management Committee that we should have limited referral rights to WHHA property (Short-Life). The Committee is yet to decide on this. Mr Keats also said that WHHA could act as a development agency for us if we could acquire privately owned houses temporarily, as long as we approached Brent Community Housing first if the property was in Brent. Hopefully, this new dimension will lead to an expansion of what we can provide for our clients.

TOWARDS OUR OWN HOUSING ASSOCIATION

We have had a fruitful discussion with Mr Jon Fitzmaurice of the National Federation of Housing Associations. Setting up our own HA has many advantages, including the right to describe our housing work as charitable and access to funding for hostels, short-life and permanent accommodation. The immediate cost (about £400) is trivial compared to the benefits. We would be able to avail ourselves of the development services of other HA's (John Keene of BPHA has assured us of this in the case of his organisation). There is no question of us competing with existing HA's.

ADVICE SESSIONS

We have now started a second Advice Session, 2-5 on Thursdays, in addition to 3-7 on Wednesdays. In order that follow-up work, development of housing strategy, research, etc, get done it really is important that clients are encouraged to call during the Advice Sessions whenever possible.

Jim Smith